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The Catholic church and the  
Bible







THE CALVERT SERIES  
HILAIRE BELLOC, *General Editor*

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AND THE BIBLE

## THE CALVERT SERIES

HILAIRE BELLOC, *General Editor*

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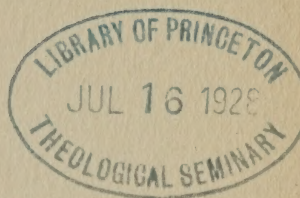
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# THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE BIBLE



BY  
REV. HUGH POPE, O.P.

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## FOREWORD

IN THE space at one's command it is impossible to do justice to so vast a question as the relations of the Church and the Bible. For whereas the speculative side of the question is simple enough the practical aspect of it involves the discussion of many historical issues. Moreover, all will acknowledge that ideas opposed to those set forth in the following pages have long been in possession. This may serve to explain why at times we have spoken with considerable emphasis.

The English-speaking peoples were once famous as readers and lovers of the Bible. It would be idle to pretend that it is so now. Yet for this there must be a reason, and to our minds the reason is plain: the Bible has become like a ship torn from its moorings; those who have pinned their faith to it alone are literally tossed about by every wind and wave of criticism. If the pages which follow do anything to orientate such minds afresh and show them that there is no need to lose faith in the Bible once it is restored to its true anchorage, they will have achieved something despite their many imperfections.



## EDITOR'S PREFACE

WHILE Christendom was united, two authorities, one primary, the other secondary, were put forward as the bases of Christian belief. The first was a living, traditional authority, that of the existent and continuous Church. Her personal voice, her interpretation of all problems, was the main foundation. But, apart from this, appeal was made universally and continuously, by the Church herself, to another authority, which was also a part of herself, yet had to be vouched for by herself. That authority was the canon of Holy Writ. Here one has to go very carefully, lest one should use any word that would conflict with sound doctrine and definition. It is matter for the expert theologian rather than for the layman. Scripture did not become Scripture by the authority of the Church; but it is the authority of the Church which decides what is Scripture and what is not.

When the breakdown of Christian unity took place in the sixteenth century, and a great part of Christendom was lost to the Catholic Church, of the two authorities one alone was left upstanding. To that one alone, therefore, men referred for their conclusions upon matters of final import: for the answers to the only questions which are really worth asking about human life and its conduct: the questions on the answers to which depend the ultimate fate of man (whether he be immortal; if so, to what end of happiness or unhappiness, and why).

Scripture remained, for the separated sects of Christendom, not only the sole, but the main authority. The fact that the Catholic Church claimed to interpret Scripture, to



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define the limits between what was and what was not canonical, to include in practice and doctrine much that was not superficially obvious in a personal reading of Scripture, led to her being regarded in the Reformed Churches as the enemy of that very group of documents which she had presented to the world, upon which she continued to rely, and which she cites copiously after nearly two thousand years, and will continue to cite copiously as the reference for her doctrine and the roots of her being.

It was a strange perversion of history, but one historically understandable enough.

It is to-day, I suppose, much weakened. Your average educated man of to-day does not regard the Catholic Church as the enemy of the Bible, or as the gaoler of the Bible. He could not, if he had any reading. But this achievement in historical truth is a negative achievement. The complementary, positive achievement which remains to be secured is the pointing out of what the Bible means to the Catholic Church.

Ironically enough, it is the Catholic Church which (outside a comparatively small body of men who still base themselves on an exact literal interpretation of the English translation made three hundred years ago) is, in the modern world, the defender of Scriptural authority. Therefore is this the very moment in which the defence now thus left mainly to the Church should be understood by those outside the Church. As the Church was blamed for doing something more than merely reciting the naked words of the text, as she was blamed for proclaiming the Living Voice and Tradition, so now she is being blamed for supporting too much that very authority which she had been accused in the past of neglecting. It is always so with things central and true. They are attacked first from the east and then from the west.

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At any rate it is of prime importance for the non-Catholic who takes an interest in these matters to know exactly how the Church stands herein; and the work of Father Hugh Pope, our principal English scholar and authority in these things, will sufficiently inform him.—*The Editor.*





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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
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# THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE BIBLE

## CHAPTER I

THE BIBLE IS THE CHURCH'S CHARTER. REVELATION. INSPIRATION,  
INFALLIBILITY. TRADITION. THE ALLEGED "VICIOUS CIRCLE."

THE very title of this booklet is a challenge: "The Church and the Bible." To many a preposterous order, for surely, "the Bible and the Church"? Is not the Bible the parent of the Church, which sprang from it and which is ever turning to it as its sponsor and guarantor? Now if by "the Church" we mean the living organism inaugurated by Christ when on earth, then it will be true that the Bible in part—that is, the Old Testament—preceded it in point of time, though the New Testament will remain as solely the product of the Christian Church. But if by "the Church" we mean all believers in Christ, whether to come to redeem the world—as the Hebrews of the Old Dispensation believed—or as having already come, then it is clear that the Church taken in this larger sense produced the Bible.

We have simple parallels in Magna Carta, or in the American Declaration of Independence: Britain and the United States respectively produced them, and as the charters of their rights they depend on them, and the Britain and America of to-day are the results of them.

So with the Church and the Bible: the Bible is her

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product yet she takes her stand on it, and the Church of to-day stands or falls by it. This will become clearer if we grasp what the Bible really is. People often speak of it as "the revealed Word of God." Yet that is hardly correct. For the Bible is not revealed, though it is the written record of God's revelation.

Now it is one thing to believe that God did speak to certain men, quite another to believe their written record of what God said to them. Why should we believe it? I may believe that a particular General won such-and-such a battle, but that will not make me believe his account of that battle. Indeed, the very fact that he is narrating his own doings would incline me to scepticism. It would be ridiculous to say that we believe the Biblical records because God spoke to the writers. What He said to them is one thing; their account of it is another. Moreover, is it true that God did speak to all the Biblical writers? Did He reveal Himself to Luke, for instance, or to the writer of Esther?

As a matter of fact we only believe God's revelation to men when we have proof of the fact that He did so speak. Proof we must have if our acceptance of such revelation is to be reasonable, and therefore a "human" act. The proof for those who listened to the claims put forward by such men as Isaias and Jeremias—the claim that God had actually spoken to them—lay in the miracles they worked in support of their claims, in the prophecies they uttered and which men saw fulfilled—at least in part; and this proof found confirmation in the personal lives of the Prophets themselves. But on what grounds do we at this day believe that such men as Isaias ever lived? Why believe that God spoke to him or the others? Why believe that the account of such revelations was really written by them? Still more: granting that they actually did commit these records to



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writing, what guarantee have we at this date of the accuracy of the record?

Contemporaries of the Prophets believed that God really had spoken to them because they had the testimony of wonders performed by them in proof of their claims, wonders which—so they felt—argued the direct action of the Author of Nature. But why did succeeding generations believe in the trustworthy character of the written accounts of the Divine messages which these Seers had left behind them? Was there any intrinsic quality in those writings which set them apart, which stamped them with the impress of truth? Hardly the beauty of the story, for no one would call Chronicles beautiful. Nor again their moral charm, for Esther might, in the judgment of many, be termed “unmoral”; in fact, the Hebrew Esther does not even contain the Name of God!

Moreover, such criteria as beauty and moral charm are largely subjective, dependent on individual taste. In truth, it seems impossible to think of any objective quality in written records which should compel the judgment of the human race to say: That is absolutely true, trustworthy, genuine, and therefore demands our whole-hearted acceptance. Yet can anything short of that satisfy us when it is a question of writings which claim to present us with authentic messages from God, which claim to tell us what we are to believe and do if we would please Him, our First Cause, and therefore our Ultimate End, the very goal of our lives? At times people speak as though the final solution of the problem lay in the authenticity of the writings in question. Men argue: This is undoubtedly the work of Isaias the Prophet; therefore it is absolutely reliable. But a purely literary decision touching the authenticity of a writing is open to revision, and therefore not final. Further, would the fact that Isaias was “a man

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of God" secure for his record of God's dealings with him—and through him with the world in general—absolute reliability? Only if, in addition to making revelations to him, God bestowed on him some further gift which should stamp his writings with inerrancy.

Here we have a distinction too often lost sight of: revelation and inspiration are not interchangeable terms though they are correlatives. God reveals when He "unveils," or manifests to man, some truth which he otherwise could not know—the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, for instance; or some truth at which human intelligence could indeed arrive but only with difficulty, or with much error mixed up with it, e.g., the truth of God's existence, of His mercy, justice and judgments. Now inspiration must of course be subsequent to revelation, its necessary corollary. For if that revelation is to be committed to writing at the Divine behest, then there must be some guarantee of fidelity on the part of the writers so commissioned. He writes as an intelligent human being, as a free agent, by the interplay of intellect and will—where precisely error can creep in, for his intellect may be clouded, his will stubborn; hence God must illumine his intellect and move his will.

But who is to say that any man has received such illuminations and impulses? Does the inspired writer work further miracles to show that he is inspired? Can we apply literary tests for its discoverment? The very fact that the various books of the Bible supply us with almost every form of literature, with every degree of merit, is sufficient disproof of any such notion. Neither can we say that it is their truth which proves their inspired character, for it is precisely their truth which is at issue. The writings are true because inspired, not inspired because true.

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It is well to put these problems and questionings in the forefront. For until we grasp them we can never understand the relative positions of Church and Bible.

We spoke of revelation and inspiration as correlative terms. But we do not mean that neither could exist without the other. Revelation could exist without inspiration; for revelation is not necessarily committed to writing, and inspiration is simply the Divinely arranged guarantee of the reliability of the written record. The same applies to the Church and the Bible. You could have the Church without the Bible, though not without revelation. For by the Church we understand those who in all ages have believed in God's revelation, whether that revelation was of Christ Who was to come, or of Christ Who has come; whether, that is, it came through the Synagogue or through the Christian body. Had God been content to reveal Himself to His Church, or the society of believers, without at the same time commanding that that revelation should be committed to writing, there would have been no Bible. Hence the Bible derives its origin from the Church, for it is nothing more than a record of God's dealings with His Church, put into writing by members of that Church at His command and with His accompanying inspiration.

Revelation and inspiration, then, are correlatives; but there is a third factor in the case—infallibility. For on the supposition that God has revealed Himself to His Church, that Church must know with absolute certainty that such revelation has been made, where it is to be found, and—in proportion to human needs—what that revelation means. The analogy of Magna Carta recurs. The British nation evolved it; to live by it that nation must be certain of the fact of its existence, of where it is to be found, and

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of its interpretation. If Britain or America ceased to live according to the principles of their respective charters they would have betrayed their heritage; though they might still be nations, they would not be the British or American nations. Similarly, if the Church of God ceased to live according to the Bible, its charter, it would cease to be the Church which from Abraham to our day has been in the broadest sense the assemblage of believers in God's revelations.

To sum up: Revelation is God's manifestation of truth necessary to salvation; inspiration is the Divine safeguard of its committal to writing; infallibility is a further safeguard of the contents and interpretation of that written record. Or, to look at it from another angle: the truths revealed constitute the deposit of faith; on those, and only those, can I exercise divine faith, and the Church her prerogative of infallible pronouncement. Here, then, are three correlative terms: revelation, faith and infallibility.

Further: have we any reason for supposing that God's revelation is confined to the pages of the Bible? No, for the more one studies the Law and the Prophets, the more patent it becomes that the records they have left behind them only cover a moiety of what was disclosed to them. St. John of course is explicit on this point for the details of Christ's life.<sup>1</sup> Nor is there any reason for supposing that revealed truths not committed to the pages of the Bible were any less "official" or public than those therein enshrined.

Clearly this opens up a vista full of possibilities. For while the foregoing will have made it evident that what we may term the "active" Rule of Faith, namely, the decisive voice regarding the contents and interpretation of the Bible, will not lie with the Bible itself—for example

<sup>1</sup> Jn. xx. 30.



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the Bible itself nowhere tells us that it is inspired <sup>2</sup> nor what books form its complement—so neither can we regard the Bible as the entire “passive” Rule of Faith, since it does not contain the entirety of the revelation on which decision has to be passed. The term “tradition” is a bugbear to many. Yet “tradition” simply means “what has been handed down.” It is immaterial whether it has been handed down in those writings we call the Bible, or in other writings, or even not in writing at all. Thus the Council of Trent says:

The Holy and Oecumenical Synod of Trent . . . seeing that this same truth and teaching (that set forth by Christ and His Apostles) is contained in written Books and also in unwritten traditions (that is, not written in the Bible) which—being received from the mouth of Christ by the Apostles, or by the same Apostles from the Holy Spirit’s dictation, have come down to us as though delivered by hand—receives and reveres with equal devotion and veneration, in accordance with the example of the Orthodox Fathers, all the Books of the Old and New Testaments alike, since the one God is the Author of both; also the traditions concerning faith and morals derived, as it were, from Christ’s mouth or dictated by the Holy Spirit and preserved in the Catholic Church by continuous succession.<sup>3</sup>

This principle of “tradition” is a fundamental one with the Church. In her Councils she does not so much explore

<sup>2</sup> St. Paul writing to Timothy (II Tim. iii. 16) merely says that “all Scripture inspired of God is profitable. . . .” He does not say that all Scripture is inspired but that such as is inspired is profitable. The only legitimate deduction from his words is that there is such a thing as inspired Scripture, but from no passage in the Bible can it be discovered which those inspired Scriptures are.

<sup>3</sup> Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, No. 783.



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Holy Scripture as try to discover what has been "handed down."

Tertullian adduces several examples of traditions when discussing the question "whether tradition should be admitted when not written"—not, that is, in the Bible. Amongst others he mentions the Sign of the Cross, the ceremonies at Baptism and in the administration of the other Sacraments. He concludes:

If you insist on having positive Scripture injunctions on these points you will find none. Tradition will be offered to you as their originator, custom as their fortifier, and faith as their observer. That reason will support tradition and custom and faith you will learn either for yourself, or from someone who has so learned. But in the meantime you will believe that there is a reason to which submission is due.<sup>4</sup>

It will be noticed that Tertullian here alleges "active" tradition—"tradition . . . their originator"—in support of "passive" tradition or the thing "handed down."

Similarly St. Irenaeus:

The path of those who belong to the Church circumscribes the whole world; for the Church possesses the sure tradition of the Apostles and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same. . . . Undoubtedly the preaching of the Church is true and steadfast, in her one and the same way of salvation is shewn throughout the whole world, for to her is entrusted the Light of God . . . those, then, who desert the preaching of the Church call in question the knowledge of the Holy Elders.<sup>5</sup>

The same idea appears when Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, said at the Council of Ephesus:

<sup>4</sup> *De Corona* iii.

<sup>5</sup> *Adv. Haer.* V. xx. 1-2.

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In these things (he is speaking of the twofold nature of Christ) we follow the Holy Fathers; if anyone teaches differently he has got away from the straight and royal road.\*

Once again the analogy of Magna Carta will help us. England is not governed simply by the letter of that heritage, but rather by the mentality that produced it; it is not so much the law that matters as the mind of the legislator. A State is a moral personality with continuity of mind and outlook. When such continuity is broken we have a "revolution." But until that happens the State governs by exploring her own mind which, so long as she does not change her personality, does not alter regarding fundamental principles. Nor are those principles solely what she has committed to writing in some formal document; rather are they the mentality which produced the document, commented on it as occasion arose, and applied its teachings to individual cases according to circumstances.

And what is true of the State is even more true of the Church. For she is a Divine, not merely a human, personality.

Note, too, the precision with which St. Cyril speaks about the relative positions of the Church and the Bible: "Be careful to learn—and that from the Church—which are the books of the Old and the New Testaments . . . have nothing to do with the Apocrypha. Carefully meditate these alone (viz., the received books), for we receive them in the Church with all confidence."†

At Chalcedon the same principle was invoked: "We," says Sabbas the Bishop, "have learned to follow the Fathers. For the Fathers who met at Nicaea did not speak out of their own minds, but what the Holy Spirit dictated to

\* Mansi, *Concilia* V. 27.

† Catech. Lect. IV.

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them." Eutyches' last attempt at evasion of the doctrine urged against him was the suggestion that it was something new. But the answer came promptly: "It is not we who are bringing in a novelty, but—believing what our Fathers taught, and in accordance with the faith they taught—in that we wish to stand and not to introduce any novelty."<sup>8</sup>

That the sound faith is not to be discovered in Scripture alone was a cardinal principle throughout the disputes at Ephesus and Chalcedon, where both Nestorius and Eutyches, as indeed Arius before them and every heresiarch in subsequent ages, endeavoured to prove their doctrine by appeal to certain passages of the Bible. Thus the fourth "anathema" pronounced at Nicaea ran:

If anyone attributes to two distinct persons or Hypostases the expressions which repeatedly occur in the Gospels, or in the writings of the Apostles, and which are said by holy men about Christ, or by Christ about Himself, and shall ascribe some to the Man as distinct from the Word of God, and others solely to the Word of God the Father on the ground that they properly belong to God—let him be anathema.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, St. Cyril writes to John of Antioch:

We glorified God our Saviour and congratulated one another that our churches and yours enjoy a faith which is in harmony with the Divine Scriptures and with the traditions of the Fathers. . . . It is the wont of all heretics to look for support for their errors in Holy Scripture; they understand in perverse fashion

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, VI. 694, 743.

<sup>9</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* V. 10, and see the following *Declaratio* in which this doctrine is amplified.

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—and thus corrupt—what was rightly said by the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

And again:

Those who study Holy Scripture must have a wise heart, trained by good works and illumined by sound faith.<sup>11</sup>

So, too, St. Leo:

We are not allowed to depart from a single syllable of the Evangelical and Apostolic teaching, nor to think otherwise about the Divine Scriptures than the Blessed Apostles and Fathers have taught us and do teach us.<sup>12</sup>

These principles are set out with a staggering directness by Tertullian:

“Seek and ye shall find” . . . there can be no indefinite seeking for what has been taught as one single definite thing. . . . We [Christians] have in our possession that which was taught by Christ.<sup>13</sup> . . . What then you have to “seek” is what Christ has taught.<sup>14</sup> . . . Let our “seeking” therefore be in that which is our own, and from those who are our own, and concerning that which is our own—that, and that only, which can become an object of enquiry without impairing the rule of faith.<sup>15</sup>

[Tertullian then sets down the Creed as the Rule of Faith; <sup>16</sup> and he continues:] “Thy faith hath saved

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 306-310; cf. St. Cyril *On the Creed* (*ibid.*, 383), and Proclus, Archbishop of Constantinople, to the same effect (*ibid.*, 431).

<sup>11</sup> St. Cyril, *Sermon* at the Council of Ephesus after the condemnation of Nestorius (Mansi, V. 625).

<sup>12</sup> St. Leo I to the Emperor Marcian, A.D. 451.

<sup>13</sup> *De Praescriptionibus* ix.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

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thee"; "thy faith," note, not "thy skill in Scripture." Now faith has been deposited in the Rule; it has a law . . . to know nothing in opposition to the Rule of Faith is to know all things. [Heretics, Tertullian proceeds,] are still seekers, and therefore have no fixed tenets; and, having no fixed tenets, they have not yet believed. [It is idle to say:] "But they do actually treat of the Scriptures, and teach out of the Scriptures!" Of course they do! From what other source could they derive their arguments about the faith, save from the records of the faith?<sup>17</sup> . . . They insist upon Scripture . . . and in the course of discussion they weary the strong, catch the weak, and dismiss the waverers with a doubt. Consequently we confront them with this fundamental principle: We deny your right to discuss Scripture.<sup>18</sup> For if the Bible is their armoury, then before they can make use of it it ought first to be decided to whom belongs possession of the Bible, so that none may presume to use it who have no right to that privilege.<sup>19</sup> [From this Tertullian argues that when disputing with a heretic, who persists in quoting the Bible] he ought to be set right, first, because he is not to be disputed with (that is out of the Bible); secondly, because controversy out of the Bible can clearly produce no other effect than an upset to stomach or brain.<sup>20</sup>

[Further still:] Your particular brand of heresy refuses to admit certain Scriptures, and those it does admit it perverts either by additions or excisions made to serve its own purposes; even those it does admit—practically in their entirety, it yet perverts by contriving diverse interpretations. . . . Heretics place their reliance on Scriptures which they have falsely put together, and have chosen precisely because of their ambiguity. Hence however learned you may be in the Bible you will make no progress [in controverting

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.    <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.    <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.    <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.



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with them], since all you maintain is denied by the other party, and what you deny they maintain. As a matter of fact you only lose your breath and your sole gain is annoyance at their blasphemies.<sup>21</sup> . . . The natural order of things demands that (in a controversy) the first point to be discussed—the only one with which we are here concerned—is: With whom lies that very faith to which the Bible belongs? From what source, through whom, when, and to whom was handed down that “Rule” whereby men become Christians? For wherever it is proved that the true Christian “Rule” and Faith are, there likewise will be the true Scriptures with their true interpretation, as also all Christian tradition.<sup>22</sup>

All the foregoing is expressed with Scholastic precision by St. Thomas Aquinas:

The formal object of faith is the primal truth as made known to us in Sacred Scripture and in the teaching of the Church which proceeds from the primal truth. Consequently, whoso does not adhere, as to an infallible and divine rule, to the Church’s teaching—which proceeds from the primal truth made known to us in the Scriptures—has not the habit of faith, but holds the truths of faith on some other principle than faith; we have a parallel when a person holds a conclusion without knowing the premises that led up to it, it is clear that such a person has not knowledge but only opinion.<sup>23</sup>

It should hardly be necessary to refute the old canard that Catholics base their doctrine of the Inspiration of the Bible on the infallibility of the Pope, and base the latter doctrine on the inspired character of the Bible. The real

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>23</sup> *Summa Theologica* 2da, 2dae, V. iii, ad 2m.

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position is an exceedingly simple one. There exists in the world a Book, or rather a collection of books, which claims to contain God's revelations. We are not, be it noted, concerned with the truth or falsity of this claim but simply with the fact that it is made, and that it constitutes a challenge to the human race. Men can, if they choose, leave the claim alone, or pass it by with a shrug. But the thinkers of the world have never allowed it to go by default; they have assailed it from every possible point of view. This claim might be formulated somewhat as follows:

The earlier portion of the Bible, the Old Testament, tells us that a Redeemer of the world is to come. In the New Testament we are faced with the figure of One who calmly asserts that He is that Redeemer, and adds that He is not simply man, but God-made-man, for our sakes; in support of this claim He proceeds to work a series of stupendous miracles culminating in His Resurrection from the tomb.

Those for whom this claim proves incontestable are Christian, people who cannot rest content with a bare acceptance of the claim, but argue: this man has proved that He is God-made-man, consequently every act of His is the act of God, and therefore perfect. But among His many acts we find the foundation of a Church to which He gave authority to teach men the way of His salvation, and to do so unerringly. Now that Church teaches among other things that the Bible which brought men to knowledge of Christ is not merely an existing historical fact, a literary phenomenon taking rank with other literary products of the world, but that—though written by ordinary mortals—these latter were the instruments of God who was thus the Principal Author of their work, which is therefore said to be inspired.

Briefly, then, we prove the infallibility of the Church from the Bible considered as an historical fact in the world's

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history; we accept the inspiration of the Bible on the authority of that infallible Church. There is no so-called "vicious circle" here, nor any but the most irrefragable logic.

This enables us to understand the expression we have used so often—the Bible is the Church's charter. For if you question the Church's claims, she refers you to the Bible as an historical fact—not as historically true, for that is a wholly different matter. If you tell the Church that you find it hard to accept the Bible as historically true, she will tell you to settle that question for yourself. But, she will add, once you accept the Bible—at any rate in its main features—once you accept the "fact" of Prophecy and its culmination in Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, who claimed to be, and proved Himself to be, the Son of God, made man for our salvation, then you must also accept me as His Divinely appointed means for preserving and interpreting His teaching for the world to the end of time, as being "the body of Christ," "the pillar and the ground of truth."

Similarly, if you quarrel with the Church's teaching, she will refer you to the Bible as its guarantee. But if you protest that you cannot discover there all the doctrines which she sets forth, the Church will not send you to the Bible for these doctrines—though for some of them she could do so if she liked; she will send you indeed to the Bible, not to discover there the particular doctrines in question, but the fundamental doctrine of the Church's authority to teach at all. And if you prove obstinate and urge that you, or competent scholars, have as much right as any theologians of the Church to discover what really are the teachings of the Bible, the Church will gently remind you that her theologians are not the Church but the Church's children; that when they, for example, teach the doctrine of Christ's

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Resurrection in the very same flesh in which He "walked on earth," they do not do so simply because they think it is true or in accordance with the Scripture, but because they are the children of that Church which was actually present at, and witnessed those scenes, and has handed them down through the subsequent ages.

The essentially "Protestant" position on this point is thus forcibly expressed:

To give up the Bible to any Church, Roman or Anglican, is to surrender the only ideal by which the churches can be judged. You lose your standard; and you find it more and more difficult to believe in your Bible if you accept any one Church—Greek or Latin or English—as the judge of Scripture; and the older the Church the more likely it is to be devoid of the breath of that Spirit who inspires the Word. . . . The Bible was and is, then, the ultimate arbiter of religious faith and practice, an authoritative and completely trustworthy revelation of religious knowledge, and duty and destiny, a safe and sure guide to God and salvation.<sup>24</sup>

But the writer has nowhere in his pages explained how this can be.

<sup>24</sup> John Clifford, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 1892, p. 41.

## CHAPTER II

BIBLE-READING AND STUDY IN THE EARLY CHURCH; THE WITNESS  
OF SOME OF THE FATHERS AND COUNCILS. EVIDENCE OF A  
WIDESPREAD KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCRIPTURES.

PRESUMABLY it will never be possible to root out of a certain type of mind the conviction that the Church has always discouraged the reading of the Bible by her children. But then the same type of mind is convinced that Biblical scholarship only came in with the Reformation! With far more truth we might maintain that it went out with the Reformation! Let us, however, keep to the question whether the Church discourages, or ever has discouraged, her children from assiduous reading of Holy Scripture.

Keeping for the moment to the age of the Fathers, quotations without end might be offered from the Fathers of the Church who are literally never tired of urging people, lay as well as cleric, to study the Bible: "God gave it you for you to read it,"<sup>1</sup> says St. Jerome, and again, "Do what you read";<sup>2</sup> while St. Polycarp had long before said to the Philippians: "I trust that you are well read in Holy Scripture and that nought is hid from you."<sup>3</sup> Readers of St. Cyril's *Catechetical Lectures* need not to be told how emphatically he insisted on the necessity of knowing the Bible well. In more than one Council regulations were made with a view to securing a competent knowledge of the Bible by the Catechumens before they were admitted to Baptism.

Thus Can. vii. of the First Council of Constantinople,

<sup>1</sup> On *Isaias* xxii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> On *Mich.* ii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ad. Philipp.* xii.



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dealing with the reception of converts from heresy, ends with the words: "Thus we ensure that they spend a long time in the Church and listen to the Scriptures, and then we baptize them." <sup>4</sup>

Great stress, too, was laid on the public reading of the Bible in church. St. Irenaeus, for instance, takes it for granted that every earnest man "diligently reads the Scriptures in company with the priests in the church with whom lies Apostolic doctrine." <sup>5</sup> In the great Councils the Gospels—if not the whole Bible—were solemnly enthroned: "the Holy and awe-inspiring Gospels were brought out and the Archbishop Flavian sat in the President's seat"; <sup>6</sup> appeal is made to the "Gospel present before us"; Athanasius feels that Eutyches will not venture to dispute the truth of his words "in the presence of the Holy Gospels"; while Eusebius calls on Mames and Theophilus to swear on the Gospels "set before us." <sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that at the Council of Nicaea the Sacred Book of the Gospels—intended to represent the Person of God the Judge—was placed in the royal seat in the midst of the seats reserved for the Bishops so that all might look at it; the same was the case at Ephesus and Chalcedon. <sup>8</sup> The same was done at the English Synod held at Hatfield by Theodore, Sept. 17, 680, "*praepositis sacris Evangeliiis.*" <sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* III. 563, cf. Can. ii of the Synod of Antioch under P. Julius I, Mansi, II. 1310; and the Council of Orange (Auraisicanum) Can. xviii, Mansi, VI. 439.

<sup>5</sup> *Adv. Haer.*

<sup>6</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* VI. 730, 782, 798.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 726, 763.

<sup>8</sup> Note by Binius on the *Acta* of Nicaea, *ap.* Mansi, II. 730; V. 449, 1561, cf. Baronius, *ad annum*, 428, No. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils and Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, III. 142.

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That the Scriptures were read in Church assiduously is evident from the repeated references to the practice in Conciliar declarations and in remarks made incidentally by the Fathers.

In a synod held by the Persian Bishops about the year 405, Can. xii reads: "We all decide that it is fitting that on every Sunday the Gospel should be read as well as the other Books; also that preaching should continue until the third hour, and then at the fourth hour the Holy Sacrifice should be offered."<sup>10</sup> This solemn reading of the Gospels to the people was the task of the Lectors, not of the Deacon or Subdeacon;<sup>11</sup> and though a man who was still bound to perform some penance for sins he had committed could yet be admitted to the Order of "Lector," it was enacted that he should not be allowed to read the Gospel to the populace.<sup>12</sup> That these Lectors were tempted to magnify their position appears from the fact that they used to turn to the people and sing *Pax vobis* before reading the Gospel; as this was felt to be derogatory to the higher clergy, it was forbidden by the Third Council of Carthage.<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere the clergy used to remain seated during the singing or reading of the Gospel; but this was condemned by Pope Anastasius:

You tell me they sit and do not stand and listen while the words of our Lord and Saviour are read, and that they quote a tradition of their forebears for this. By Apostolic authority we order this to cease; when the Gospel is read in Church the priests and all present must not be seated, but must stand up in

<sup>10</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* III. 1170.

<sup>11</sup> *Clementine Constit.* viii. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Council of Toledo, Can. ii, Mansi, III. 999.

<sup>13</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* III. 880; cf. *ibid.*, 901.

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the presence of the Holy Gospel and bow with reverence while listening attentively to the words of the Lord.<sup>14</sup>

The Gospels had to be read on the Saturday according to the Council of Hierapolis, Can. ccxxiv, A.D. 445, and this was but a repetition of the Council of Laodicea, Can. xvi.<sup>15</sup> The same Council of Hierapolis enacted that people must not come to Church simply to hear the Bible read, Can. clxviii.<sup>16</sup>

And if the people had to listen the clergy necessarily had to have a sound knowledge of the Scriptures. To cite but one instance out of many: "We reprobate a custom which has wrongly crept in of ordaining boys who do not understand the Bible . . . for those under thirty years of age are not to be ordained."<sup>17</sup> For a similar testimony see the Arabic version of the *Acta* of Nicaea: "Those who come for ordination must first be examined by the Chor-episcopus and the Archdeacon together to see whether they properly understand the reading of Scripture."<sup>18</sup>

The consequence was that the Scriptures were, as far as we can judge, far better known by both clergy and lay-folk than they are nowadays. Eusebius tells us of people who knew them by heart;<sup>19</sup> Origen seems to presuppose universal knowledge of them;<sup>20</sup> they were not hidden by

<sup>14</sup> *Ep.* i. 1 to the Bishops of Germany and Burgundy, Mansi, III. 888, 940; though said to be spurious this testifies at least to the reverence in which the Gospels were held; cf. *Clementine Constit.* II. 57; P. Gelasius, *Ep.* ix.

<sup>15</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* VI. 486.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

<sup>17</sup> Can. xxiv of a Synod held in Syria, perhaps A.D. 405. Whether the *Acta* of this Synod are spurious as Muratori thinks, or not, does not invalidate their testimony to the mind of the Church at that time; cf. Mansi, III. 1166 and 1171.

<sup>18</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* II. 1001.

<sup>19</sup> *Hist. Eccles.* VIII. xiii.

<sup>20</sup> *Contra Celsum* vii. 403.

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the early Christians,<sup>21</sup> but they were read openly<sup>22</sup> as being "the records of the faith";<sup>23</sup> throughout the *Acta*, etc., of the Council of Ephesus, everybody is presumed to know the whole Bible.<sup>24</sup>

In his stern rebuke to Juvenal, Bishop of Jerusalem, for his remissness—to make use of a euphemism—in condemning Flavian and acknowledging Eutyches, St. Leo says: "Although it is not permissible for any priest to be ignorant of what he preaches, a Christian dwelling at Jerusalem has far less excuse than unlearned folk, since for acquiring a knowledge of the power of the Gospel he has not only the eloquent pages of Scripture but the evidence of the Holy Places themselves."<sup>25</sup>

At the risk of anticipating it is worth noting that precisely the same was the case in England.

Before they are ordained they must have the weapons for their spiritual task, namely, the following Books: the Psalter, the Book of the Epistles, the Book of the Gospels and the Missal, the Book of the Chants, the Manuale, the Numerale, the Passionale, the Penitential, and the Lectionary. A priest needs these Books and cannot do without them if he desires rightly to live up to his position (*ordinem suum recte observare*) and teach the law to the people under his care; and let him be particularly careful to see that they are correctly written.<sup>26</sup>

On Sundays and Feast-days the priest should expound

<sup>21</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* xxxi: "Look into God's revelations, examine our Sacred Books, for we do not keep them in hiding, and many accidents have placed them in the hands of those who are not of us"; *cp. Ad. Uxorem* ii. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Tertullian, *De Praescriptionibus* xiv.

<sup>23</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* IV. 350.

<sup>24</sup> *Ep.* cxxxix. 2; *ap.* Mansi, VI. 298.

<sup>25</sup> *The Canons of Aelfric*, Can. xxi, A.D. 970; *cf. Liber Legum Ecclesiasticarum* xxi; Wilkins, *Concilia*, I. 252-3.

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to his people the meaning of the Gospel in English, and he should, by means of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed, rouse men to believe and practise their Christianity. The teacher must beware of what the Prophet says: "Dumb dogs! They know not how to bark!" For we have to bark—that is, preach to the laity, lest perchance through lack of teaching we destroy them. It was Christ Who in His Gospel said to foolish teachers: "If the blind lead the blind both fall into the pit." He is a blind teacher who is illiterate, and through his ignorance deceives the laity; beware of that, as your office requires.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Can. xxiii; *cp. Liber Legum* xxii-xxiii.



## CHAPTER III

### THE BIBLE IN ENGLAND PREVIOUS TO THE REFORMATION.

READERS of the previous chapter may feel inclined to urge that there was indeed a "Golden Age" of Biblical study in the Church, but that this came to a close with St. Jerome and St. Augustine. In this there is a certain amount of truth; you cannot have a perpetual "Golden Age"; there must come a time when there seems no more to be said, and when men live on the work of their predecessors until some new phenomena, some completely fresh set of circumstances, call for a revaluation of ideas. We see this exemplified in such Biblical expositors as St. Gregory the Great (*d.* 604) and the Venerable Bede (*d.* 735). It would not be unfair to describe their Biblical work as a careful presentation of what their predecessors had left them. The novelty lay in their mode of presentation of it for the needs of human souls; originality of treatment was not called for. Much the same must be said of the long series of men like Rabanus Maurus, Walafrid Strabo, and even St. Bernard, who preceded the Scholastics. These were not original scholars, nor did they pretend to be.

When we turn to England itself—and we are more immediately concerned with English-speaking countries—we shall find that throughout her history, and not merely since the Reformation, England has been a Bible-loving country.

Some two hundred years previous to the arrival of St. Augustine in this country St. Chrysostom had said:

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Were you to go to the West and pass thence to the Isles of Britain, were you to sail on the Euxine Sea, or even to the countries of the North, everywhere you would hear all the folk you met with learned in the wisdom of the Scriptures. In language different, in faith the same; in speech at variance, in mind at harmony with us.<sup>1</sup>

So, too, the Church founded in England by St. Augustine seems to have speedily become a learned Church; had it not been for the destruction wrought by the Danes this country might have rivalled the greatest homes of Biblical learning in other parts of the world. Buckingham<sup>2</sup> gives a list of no less than fifty-two monasteries destroyed by these invaders, while in his lament to Wulfgang of Croyland King Alfred draws a sad picture of the consequent decay of a learning which had been the glory of England. The King marvels that his learned predecessors should not have translated many books for the use of the faithful; he can only suppose that they never dreamed that their successors would get into such a state of ignorance as to need Latin translations! Alfred's letter really serves as an introduction to his own translation of St. Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis*, a copy of which under the title of *The Herdman's Booke* he is now sending to "every Episcopal See in the kingdom." "I think," adds the King, "that it would be an exceedingly good thing . . . if we were to translate some of those books which we regard as the most useful, into the language which all understand." <sup>3</sup> Alfred's own translations of portions of Exodus and Acts, which served as a

<sup>1</sup> *De Utilitate Lectionis Scripturarum*; cp. Hom. lxxx in Matt.; Hom. xxviii on II Cor. xii.

<sup>2</sup> *The Bible in the Middle Ages*, 1853, pp. 154, 279.

<sup>3</sup> Spelman, *Concilia*, p. 380, c. A.D. 387.

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Preface to his *Book of Ecclesiastical Rules*, give us a sample of what could be done.<sup>4</sup>

A few extracts from the comparatively scant records of the days preceding Alfred's reign and his expulsion of the Danes will show that the King's estimate of the learning of his predecessors, and more especially of their knowledge of the Bible, was not exaggerated.

(a) The *Epistle* of Gildas Cambrensis, written between A.D. 547 and 550, forms a catena of passages from practically the whole Bible; it constitutes, as Haddan and Stubbs remark, "contemporary evidence to the condition and complete organisation of the then British Church, and especially of its peculiar version of Holy Scripture."<sup>5</sup> They might have added—and of the intimate knowledge of the Bible which its members possessed.

(b) Pope Agatho, in a Council held at Rome, A.D. 679, for the regulation of the affairs of the English Church, insists strongly on much "sacred reading."<sup>6</sup> A little more than fifty years later, in 734, we have the touching letter of the Venerable Bede to Egbert, Archbishop of York, on the pastoral office. Both men are consumed with love of sacred study, and Bede urges his friend to have both in his mind and on his tongue the words of Holy Scripture, and more especially, as becomes a Bishop, the *Pastoral Epistles*; he urges, too, the use of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed in English. At the famous Council of Cloveshoe or Clyff, A.D. 747, Canons vii and viii insist on "sacred

<sup>4</sup> Wilkins, *Concilia* I. 186, 194. "You should be busily occupied in reading Sacred Scripture (*sacros libros*) and in frequent prayer, for the life of a just man is directed towards God by reading the Bible and by prayer. . . . These are the weapons whereby the devil is overcome." (From King Alfred's *Liber Legum Ecclesiasticarum* ii; Wilkins, I. 266.)

<sup>5</sup> Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils, etc.*, I. 41, 112.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 133.

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reading," while in Canons ix and x the duty of preaching, of knowing the Lord's Prayer and Creed, as also the words of the Mass and those used in the administration of the Sacraments, in the vernacular, so as the better to grasp them, and so explain them to the people, are insisted on.<sup>7</sup>

(c) How touching a picture is furnished us in St. Boniface's letter to Daniel, the Bishop of Winchester, written between A.D. 732 and 745:

Furthermore there is one solace for my pilgrimage that I should like, if I may presume to do so, to beg of you with all earnestness, and that is that you would let me have that copy of the Prophets which Winbert of holy memory—in old days my abbot and teacher—made; there you have six Prophets all together, written out in clear and plain characters. If God should put into your heart to do this you could not send me a greater consolation in my old age nor lay up for yourself a greater reward. For I cannot in this country get hold of such a copy of the Prophets as I want; now that my eyes are getting dim I cannot make out the closely written characters; that is why I want the copy I mentioned above, it is written in such clear and distinct characters.<sup>8</sup>

(d) Among the *Excerptiones* of Egbert, Archbishop of York, drawn up A.D. 750, no. cxlvi, *De Antiquo Conjugio* is remarkable for the intimate knowledge of the Bible it betrays and for the clear distinction drawn between the spirit of the Old Testament and that of the New.<sup>9</sup> In fact, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that nearly all the documents of this period are saturated with the Bible; their

<sup>7</sup> Wilkins, *Concilia* I. 95, 96.

<sup>8</sup> Given in Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils, etc.*, III. 345.

<sup>9</sup> Spelman, *Concilia*, 273-4, No. cxliv; in Wilkins, No. cxlvi, I. 110-111.



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framers seem to take it for granted that the populace are perfectly familiar with the text.

(e) Once more—though after King Alfred's time—in the *Constitutions* drawn up by Odo, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 943, we have the same insistence on the vital necessity of "sacred reading," although in this case the Canon is speaking particularly of monks, Can. vi.<sup>10</sup> Once again, in the *Statuta* of Robert Winchelsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1298, Can. iii demands the "reading of the Sacred Page," "*lectio Divinae Paginae*."<sup>11</sup>

To say that "the Anglo-Saxon versions were confined for the most part to the few religious houses where they were written" is simply fantastic.<sup>12</sup> To imply that only those who could actually handle the text for themselves could have any real knowledge of the Bible is to forget what teaching by word of mouth meant in an age when reading was necessarily the privilege of the few, and the art of printing undreamed of. A perusal of Maitland's *Dark Ages* would convince any unprejudiced reader that Anglo-Saxon copies were far from rare.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the Latin tongue was the common medium to an extent which we simply cannot now appreciate; a translation into the vernacular only seems to have become a necessity in the days of Alfred,<sup>14</sup> and after the Norman Conquest Latin seems to have been even more widespread than in the days of Augustine and Bede.

(f) Note, too, how Gerald, Archdeacon of Brecknock, in his Charge to the Clergy, A.D. 1175, concludes by asking them

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 213.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 245-246.

<sup>12</sup> Paterson Smyth, *How We Got Our Bible*, 2d ed., 1889, p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> To take but one instance which he gives from Martene, *Voyage Litteraire*, pp. 128: the travellers, Mabillon & Martene, found in an Abbey at Metz "les grands et petits prophetes écrits en lettres Saxoné" (*The Dark Ages*, p. 291).

<sup>14</sup> See this King's lament, p. 38.



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"to pray that God may open to me His Holy Scriptures, not only that I may understand them but also keep them and observe them; and that His Grace may bring me by this habitual study to a fuller grasp of his teaching."<sup>15</sup>

From the mass of facts given by Maitland<sup>16</sup>—themselves but a fraction of what might be culled—take the following which concern England alone:

St. Aldhelm bought in the year 705 a Bible from a ship which had come into Dover, and presented it to the Abbey of Malmesbury;<sup>17</sup> similarly Offa, King of the Mercians, presented a Bible to the Church at Worcester, in 780;<sup>18</sup> in 1077, Paul, Abbot of St. Albans, gave "two Texts (certainly Bibles) adorned with gold, silver, and precious stones" to the Church there.<sup>19</sup> We read the same of Ralph, Bishop of Rochester, who in 1114 presented "a beautifully gilded 'text'" to his Church;<sup>20</sup> his successor, Walter, gave "a golden text of the Gospels."<sup>21</sup> Maitland adds many more instances in England. We cannot pass over, however, the following from the letter of one monk to another. It was written about 1170:

A monastery without a library is like a castle without an armoury. . . . See to it therefore that in your

<sup>15</sup> Haddan & Stubbs, *Councils, etc.*, I. 379.

<sup>16</sup> *The Dark Ages; a Series of Essays, intended to illustrate the state of Religion and Literature in the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, by the Rev. S. R. Maitland, F.R.S. and F.S.A., Librarian to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Keeper of the MSS. at Lambeth, London, 1844. It is abundantly evident to the reader of this fascinating volume that the author's conclusions came as somewhat of a shock even to himself; at every turn he betrays his anxiety lest his readers should accuse him of exaggeration. The result is that he has consistently understated rather than overstated his points.

<sup>17</sup> Maitland, *l. c.* 193.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

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armoury of defence that which is the great defence of all the other defences is not wanting. That defence is the Holy Bible, wherein is contained the right rule of life and manners.<sup>22</sup>

Maitland confesses that in the course of all his researches into the "Dark Ages" he has come across no single instance in which the Bible was treated with disrespect, no instance of its being kept from the people.<sup>23</sup> Nor can he discover any hint that the Bible was regarded simply as a treasure which was hardly to be used at all or which was simply for the use of the monks themselves:

I do think [he says] that there is sufficient evidence —(I) that during that period (the so-called "Dark Ages") the Scriptures were more accessible to those who could use them; (II) were in fact more used; and (III) by a greater number of persons—than some modern writers would lead us to suppose.<sup>24</sup>

While conceding that Maitland has destroyed the legend . . . "that no Catholic ever knew his Bible well," Dr. Coulton adds:

But Maitland leaves room for, without himself propagating, an equally false legend on the other side. The rough truth may be put very simply; the best mediaeval writers knew their Vulgate very well; a great many more knew parts of it well enough, especially those portions which happened to come in their service-books. The average priest knew nothing outside those service-books, and not even all that was inside; the lower priesthood, as Roger Bacon and other equally credible witnesses testify, understood little or nothing even of their church offices. The laity

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-191; cf. p. 260.

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could seldom read Latin with any ease, outside the sort of hotel-waiter's vocabulary with which a bailiff wrote his accounts or a scrivener his legal formulae; therefore the most educated and ambitious seldom got beyond the Psalms and Sunday Gospels and Epistles. A few of the richest possessed Bibles in French or Psalters in French or English; but as soon as a general desire for vernacular translation arose, this was opposed by the Ecclesiastical authorities, and for the rest of the Middle Ages vernacular Bibles were either explicitly condemned, or lay under a strong suspicion of heresy.<sup>25</sup>

The reader must attach what value he thinks fit to a generalisation like this; not a vestige of proof for this "rough truth" is offered, while it seems strange that a competent student of mediaeval history should accept at their face-value the statements of Roger Bacon on a subject on which he felt strongly and habitually expressed himself more strongly. Moreover, niggardly though the concession is in spirit, yet it really constitutes no small tribute. Could as much be said nowadays for people's knowledge of the Bible, despite the printing-press?

Some idea of the amount of daily reading of the Bible, which, as forming part of the Divine Office, was incumbent on the clergy, may be gathered from the *Constitutions* of Lanfranc in A.D. 1072;<sup>26</sup> still more from Ulric's description of the *Customs* of Cluny. There the whole of the *Octateuch*, or first eight books of the Bible, was read through between Septuagesima and the beginning of Lent. The whole of Jeremias was read in Passion Week and the first three days of Holy Week; Isaias took six days, the Epistle to the Romans two days, and so on. It is not surprising

<sup>25</sup> *Five Centuries of Religion*, 1923, I. 291.

<sup>26</sup> Wilkins, *Concilia* I. 341.

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to hear that the office of one of the monks was to circulate with a lantern which he flashed on the faces of all; if they were awake they bowed, if they were asleep the lantern was left there till the delinquent awoke, when he had to try and discover another sleeper! Nor was such official reading confined to the choir, it was carried on in the Refectory as well, so that apparently the entire Bible was read through more than once—at least for certain parts—in the course of the year. The custom at Cluny was to recite one hundred and thirty-eight out of the hundred and fifty Psalms each day!<sup>27</sup> The Psalter was of course known by heart; in the *Rule of St. Benedict* a distinction was made between “reading” other portions of the Bible and “saying” the Psalms.

Tyndale’s commentary on this is characteristic of the Reformers:

Your singing is but roaring, to stretch out your maws (as do your other gestures and rising at midnight) to make the meat sink to the bottom of the stomach, that he may have a perfect digestion, and be ready to devour afresh against the next refecton.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Maitland, *Dark Ages*, pp. 336-8, quoted from D’Achery, *Spicilegium*.

<sup>28</sup> *Exposition* of Matt. vii. 15. Maitland, who quotes this, *op. cit.*, note, p. 302, remarks: “Were it not that the malignity is as disgusting as the absurdity is amusing, one must needs laugh at the motive which Tyndale, the reformer, assigns for the practice.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BIBLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES. THE USE MADE OF IT BY THE SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGIAN AND IN MEDIAEVAL SERMONS. THE LATIN VULGATE BIBLE.

PASSING from what are popularly known as the "Dark Ages" we come to the Middle Ages, a period during which it is generally supposed that the Bible was practically unknown. But whether we take the clergy or the laity, the very opposite is the truth. The theologian realised that the Bible was at least the main quarry whence the Church's doctrines were ultimately derived, including of course the doctrine about the Church itself. Consequently he regarded an intimate knowledge of the actual text of the Bible as an essential condition for acquiring a knowledge of theology. We may take as an example, which shall serve for all the rest, the Dominicans or Friars Preachers. Among them certain convents were set apart for the study of the Bible, and a professor was appointed who was termed the *Lector Biblicus*. It was not his duty to expound the text, but to teach the actual text to the students, who of course could not be expected to possess copies of the Bible in manuscript. This intimate acquaintance with the text was regarded as the necessary preliminary to its exposition, and therefore to the more formal, systematised theology. Every young professor had perforce to begin by teaching the Bible "biblically," or "textually," as Pope John XXII describes it in 1317; he then passed on to the teaching of the systematised



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theology of the Church, generally as enshrined in the *Sentences of Peter Lombard* and later in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. When, usually after some fourteen years so spent, he took his degree as Master in Theology, he returned to the study of the Bible which he now practically knew by heart; he devoted himself to that systematic exposition of the "Sacred Page"—note that such Masters were generally termed *Magistri Sacrae Paginae* rather than *Magistri in Sacra Theologia*—for which his knowledge of the Bible and the theology quarried from it had now prepared him.

That this is no idealised picture will be readily granted by those who are familiar with the writings of the great Scholastics; they seem literally to have known the text of the Bible by heart. They were also deeply read in the works of the great Fathers and commentators whose one study had been the Bible as containing God's revelation to us men.

Nor were these ideas confined to the Mendicant Orders and those who held Chairs in Universities. In the minute directions laid down in A.D. 1337, by Benedict XII for the Black Monks of England, the section *On Studies* opens with the words: "Since the pearl of knowledge is acquired by assiduous reading, and by the study of the Sacred Page we attain an intimate knowledge of the Divine Majesty, and by acquaintance with human law the mind learns to reason effectively and becomes steeped in the principles of justice . . ." <sup>1</sup> The Pontiff then proceeds to minute details touching the students whom the various monastic houses are encouraged to send to Paris. Amongst others: "All those who, whether at Paris or in some other General House of study, have studied Sacred Theology alone for

<sup>1</sup> *Constitutiones Benedicti XII pro Monachis nigris*, A.D. 1337; Wilkins, *Concilia* II. 599.

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six years, and are sufficiently equipped in primary studies, can give at Paris the usual Biblical courses. Whereas only those who have studied Theology alone for eight years can teach the *Sentences* (that is, Systematic Theology) at Paris." In the same Pontiff's regulations for the reform of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine,<sup>2</sup> drawn up A.D. 1327, he lays down that "no one can give the Biblical course (*legere cursum Bibliae*) at Paris unless he has studied there for seven years; nor can he lecture on the *Sentences* unless he has studied there ten years."

That Hebrew was taught at Oxford as early as A.D. 1320 is certain, for Walter Raynold, the Archbishop of Canterbury, reminds one of his Suffragans of the tax "for providing a salary for the convert who is teaching the Hebrew language at Oxford."<sup>3</sup>

The veritable key to the Middle Ages is the Latin Vulgate Bible, as every scholar whose interests lead him to the documents of the period is bound to acknowledge. The story of its formation and of its even more wonderful preservation is one of the epics of the world.<sup>4</sup> Translated from Hebrew by St. Jerome, or in the case of those Books of the Old Testament which were not originally written in Hebrew, also in the case of the New Testament, corrected by him—it was the great literary treasure of Christendom. It was more than that; it was the great medium for the propagation of the Gospel. The gradual corruption of the current text of this version was inevitable when, in default of the printing-press, stereotyped editions were an

<sup>2</sup> *Constitutiones Benedicti XII super reformatione canonicorum regularium ordinis S. Augustini*, A.D. 1339; Wilkins, *Concilia* II. 640.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkins, *Concilia* II. 599.

<sup>4</sup> For fuller details we may refer to *Aids to the Bible*, 1926, I. 205-245.

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impossibility. It is to the labours of men like Alcuin, *d.c.* 800, Lanfranc, *d.* 1089, and St. Stephen Harding, *d.c.* 1150, that the preservation of a sound text of this Latin Bible is due. The more we realise the gulf that lies between the means at their disposal and the equipment of the modern scholar, the more wonderful their work appears. Without their labours the task of the Tridentine and post-Tridentine editors of the Vulgate Latin Bible would have been well-nigh impossible. It is well to remember, too, that all these revisers of the Latin copies, from Alcuin down to the present day, found no better manuscript than that copied at Wearmouth or Jarrow, and presented to the Pope by Abbot Ceolfrid in A.D. 715, and known as *Codex Amiatinus*. Scholars to-day realise to the full the significance of this Latin Bible, not merely as one of the oldest witnesses to the original text underlying it, but as the chief witness to, and preservative of, the faith in Europe. It is a translation of course. But, then, do we not all depend on translations for our knowledge of the Bible? How many are the scholars who even to-day can use their Hebrew Bible as freely as they use their Authorised or Revised Versions? The more intimately men study this wonderful translation and ponder its vicissitudes, the more ready they are to acknowledge its fidelity to the original. Who produced it? The Catholic Church. Who preserved it? Again the Catholic Church. And still men maintain that the Church is afraid of the Bible!

Nor was this Latin version regarded simply as a literary treasure, as the peculiar property of the clergy, as a thing practically unknown to the laity. Few people nowadays are likely to read mediaeval sermons. Yet if they ever have the courage to do so they will find out that there is far more quotation of the Bible than in any sermon preached at

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the present time.<sup>5</sup> Moreover the preachers seemed to take it for granted that their hearers were thoroughly familiar with the text.

Almost the first fruits of the printing-press was the Latin Bible. Of this no less than one hundred and twenty-four editions appeared in fifty years; while "by 1507 (the year in which Luther is supposed to have 'discovered' the Bible at Erfurt) more than one hundred Latin Bibles had been printed, some of them small and cheap pocket editions."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> To give but one example: Robert Holcot, O.P., died in 1349; he is spoken of as "most learned in the Divine Scriptures, not unskilled in profane literature, famous for his eloquence, and a notable preacher." His *Praelectiones in Librum Sapientiae* was first printed in 1481, and at least twelve editions appeared before 1586. His sermons are replete with quotations of the Bible.

<sup>6</sup> H. Stevens in the *Athenaeum*, Oct. 6, 1883, quoted by Alnatt, *The Bible and the Reformation*, p. 21.

## CHAPTER V

THE BIBLE AT THE REFORMATION. THE CONSTITUTION OF OXFORD. TRUE APPROACH TO THE SCRIPTURES. "THE BIBLE AND THE BIBLE ONLY." DEVOUT READING OF THE BIBLE. WHY THE CHURCH CONDEMNS CERTAIN TRANSLATIONS SO VEHEMENTLY.

WE now come to the stormy period of the Reformation. Probably few stories have been more industriously spread and more guilelessly swallowed than that of Tyndale's translation of the New Testament. How assiduously we have been told that the clergy dreaded the appearance of an English version of the Gospels lest their own frauds should be detected; how often, too, has been repeated the story about the absolute ecclesiastical prohibition of any English version! Enormous pains must have been taken to make folk believe this even while Tyndale's translation was in the making. This translation appeared in 1525, yet in his *Dialogue concerning Tyndale*,<sup>1</sup> written in 1529,<sup>2</sup> Sir Thomas More formulates all these canards and puts them in the mouth of the "Messenger"—his fictitious opponent<sup>3</sup>—who insists on the existence of a "Constitution" to this effect and maintains that it emanated from the clergy. But More replies:

<sup>1</sup> A new edition of this hitherto practically inaccessible volume has just appeared: *The Dialogue concerning Tyndale*, by Sir Thomas More, reproduced in black letter facsimile from William Rastell's edition of More's English works (1557) with an Historical Introduction and Philological Notes by A. W. Reed, M.A., D. Litt., and a version in modern spelling and an essay on the doctrinal aspects of the work, by the Editor, W. E. Campbell; Eyre and Spottiswoode.

<sup>2</sup> *Dialogue* iii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, i. I.



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Many men talk of it; but no man knoweth it. For there is none such indeed. There is of truth a constitution that speaketh of such matter; but nothing of such fashion. [More then points out first of all that there had always existed English translations of the Bible:] Wicklif [he says], whereas the whole Bible was long before his days, by virtuous and well-learned men, translated into the English tongue, and by good and godly people with devotion and soberness, well and reverently read, took upon him of a malicious purpose to translate it of new.

He refers to this point again: "Old ones [translations] that were before Wyclif's days remain lawful, and be in some folks' hands had and read." <sup>4</sup> But to the point at issue, the supposed *Constitution* forbidding English translations of the Scriptures, More replies by giving a paraphrase of the *Constitution* drawn up under Archbishop Arundel by the Council of Oxford in 1408. The actual words are:

It is dangerous, as St. Jerome declares, to translate the text of Holy Scripture out of one idiom into another, since it is not easy in translating to preserve exactly the same meaning in all things. . . . We therefore command and ordain that henceforth no one translate any text (it is a question of passages, *texta* in the heading of the *Constitution*) of Holy Scripture into English or any other language in a book, or booklet or tract of this kind lately made in the time of the said John Wyclif or since, or that hereafter may be made either in part or wholly, either publicly or privately, under pain of excommunication, until such translation shall have been approved and allowed by the diocesan of the place, or (if need be) by the Provincial Council. He who shall act otherwise let him be punished as an abettor of heresy and error. <sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Wilkins, *Concilia* III. 317.

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No better comment on this could be furnished than More's own words:

It neither forbiddeth the translations to be read, that were already done of old before Wyclif's days, nor dammeth his because it was new, but because it was naught; nor prohibiteth new to be made, but provideth that they shall not be read, if they be made amiss, till they be by good examination amended.<sup>6</sup>

This would seem to furnish conclusive testimony to the existence of English versions other than Wyclif's. Yet a recent critic writes: "More's authority as a historian is less than his authority as a lawyer. . . . He had only the linguistic and historical equipment of his contemporaries; much too little linguistic or historical knowledge to be able to assign an old English manuscript to a particular century." <sup>7</sup> This is certainly an astonishing view of a man who had an European fame as a scholar and linguist, who was Chancellor of England and accustomed all his life to handling manuscripts and documents of all sorts. It is even worse to describe his positive statements that the Wycliffite Bible he had seen and examined was heretical as an "inaccurate guess."

<sup>6</sup> *Dialogue* iii. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Deansley, *The Lollard Bible*, 1920, p. 12. We are not here concerned with the question of English Bibles other than Wyclif's previous to the Reformation; we may note, however, that Miss Deansley's treatment of the question is a wonderful example of the argument from silence pushed to extremes. When people like More, Foxe and Cranmer break that silence their statements are whittled away. It is to be noted, too, that in the condemnation of Wyclif by Archbishop Arundel, in 1412, it is not the fact that he had translated the Bible that is objected to, but "in every possible way he strove to assail the very faith and teaching of Holy Church; he filled up the cup of his wickedness by using as an instrument, wherewith to effect this—a *new* translation of the Bible into the vernacular" (Wilkins, *Concilia*, III. 350).

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Sir Thomas More might equally well have quoted the famous letter of Pope Innocent III which many regarded as a condemnation of translations of the Bible:

The Bishop of Metz has told us . . . that many laymen and women too, led by a desire, mainly of understanding the Bible, have had translated for themselves the Gospels, the Epistles of St. Paul, the Psalter, the *Moralia* (of St. Gregory) on Job. Their aim is that with the help of this translation, made at their own discretion—and we could wish that it had been made prudently—laymen and women could have the presumption to expound such matters and to preach to each other. . . . Now the desire to understand the Bible . . . is rather to be commended than blamed. Yet it would seem that here certain layfolk have justly incurred reproof; for they hold secret meetings and usurp the function of preaching. . . . The secret mysteries of the Faith ought not to be explained to anybody and everywhere for it is not all men who can understand them, but those alone who can approach them in the spirit of faith.<sup>8</sup>

It must always be borne in mind that a Decree and its popular interpretation are two totally different things. Thus many, no doubt, thought that the *Constitution* of Oxford in 1408, or the Letter of Innocent III in 1109, forbade the translation of the Bible. This may have been due to careless reading of such documents or to dependence on garbled accounts of their contents. This fact, however, is certain; in none of the Church's legislation is the translation of the Bible forbidden or condemned. What is condemned is translation for heretical purposes or because there is patent danger of such translations doing harm to people who are not competent to read them prudently. Thus it is unfair, unscholarly

<sup>8</sup> Migne, *Patrol Latina* CCXIV. 695-699.

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and historically inaccurate to say that the Church at any period resisted the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, unless in the same context it be stated why this was done.

The principle underlying this is of course that the Bible belongs to the Church, precisely as Magna Carta belongs to Britain, or the Declaration of Independence to America. Now, while it is open to anybody to read Magna Carta, it is evident that no one will understand or be able to interpret it correctly unless steeped in the spirit and needs of the age that begot it; in other words, none but a qualified historian is competent to read the Charter with any profit. It will be equally clear that no one could really penetrate the spirit of that Charter and discover in it the seeds whence the present British Constitution has sprung unless he were thoroughly familiar with both the Charter and the Constitution, and had imbibed deeply of their spirit—in other words, unless he were an Englishman. Would any quantity of study of the Charter and the Constitution give a man the temperament and outlook of an Englishman? But if he comes to that study with a spirit of kinship and affinity many things will be plain to him which are as a sealed book to the stranger approaching it from without.

In the same way the sole key to the Bible is the Redemption wrought by Christ and applied to all subsequent generations by the Church which, as the Bible clearly teaches, Christ instituted for that purpose.<sup>9</sup> Those who approach the study of the Bible from any other angle are approaching it from without; they have not the key, they are searching for it. When they have that key the Bible unlocks its treasures to them, not before. This is surely the Apostle's meaning when he tells us that we are no longer "strangers and foreigners, but members of the household of God."<sup>10</sup> Not, of course,

<sup>9</sup> Matt. xvi. 13-19, xviii. 17-18, xxviii. 19-20; Lk. xxii, 31-32; Rom. x. 14-15; Ephes. ii. 19-22; I Tim. iii. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ephes. ii. 19.



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that approach from without is wrong; it is necessary for them that are without.<sup>11</sup> But in their study they either discover the key, which is Christ and His Body—the Church<sup>12</sup>—or they fail to do so. So long as they fail they wander, tossed about by every wind and wave of doctrine.<sup>13</sup> But, if they succeed, then they become children of the Church and straightway their attitude towards the Bible changes; it has shown them a door, and they have entered and found themselves in the presence of one who says: “You have been reading my Chapter; now I will explain it to you.”

It would be manifestly absurd for these children of the Church now to turn on their mother and say that they think she has misunderstood the very documents which proved her existence and substantiated her claims. And if the Church should find that folk calling themselves her children were editing her Charter in such a fashion as to disprove her claims, she would have no alternative but to say: “By that very act you are showing that you are no children of mine; you are calling yourselves members of the family and at the same time repudiating your mother. You must either act as my children or quit.”

We have an instance of the application of this principle when in the year 1526 the University of Paris held that translations of the entire Bible should not be allowed as not being opportune at that time; but they conceded that certain books might be translated with appropriate notes. In the *Index of Prohibited Books* published by them in 1542, 1543 and 1544 the authorities of the University prefaced the section on French versions of the Bible with a statement on the un wisdom of allowing men of no learning, men who would

<sup>11</sup> Jn. v. 39; Acts xvii. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Ephes. i. 22-23, iv. 1-14, v. 23-32; Col. i. 18-24

<sup>13</sup> Ephes. iv. 14; Jas. 1-6; Jude 12.



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read without piety or humility, having translations of the Bible; they instanced the Waldenses and Albigenses, etc.<sup>14</sup>

This has been the unvarying attitude of the Church when it is a question of her children reading the Scriptures. She has always encouraged them to do so, but with these provisos: it is for me to edit the Bible and see that you only read it in translations approved by me; you must study it in the light of my teachings, to gain fuller illumination regarding them, not with a view to discovering whether I am right or wrong in what I have taught you.

This was the rock on which the Reformers split. They wanted to have the Scriptures accepted as the sole rule of faith; they emphatically denied the right of any Church or Council or Father of the Church to determine the meaning of any portion of Scripture.

Surius has an interesting comment on the state of things at the time of the Diet of Worms in A.D. 1540:

The heretics [he says] want the Bible to be the authority, but on condition that it shall be for them to interpret it. But was there ever a heresy which would not gladly welcome the Bible as the sole arbiter on conditions like that? How simple must be Christian souls that fail to see through a ruse like that! We have no controversy with them about the Bible, but about the meaning of the Bible. They want to dig out its meaning from their none too erudite brains; we say that that meaning is to be discovered in the perpetual agreement of the Catholic Church. But this they wholly repudiate, for they well know that their teachings, their false

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from du Plessis d'Adgentree, *Collectio judiciorum de novis erroribus*, in Merkle's edition of the *Diaria* of the Council of Trent, I. 519, note.

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private opinions, are absolutely in disagreement with the public agreement of the entire Christian world. They continue to spread the Bible abroad among the illiterate; but learned men readily perceive that the genuine sense of the Bible can no more make for their views than a lie can lead us to the truth. In fact how can they really be appealing in good faith to the Bible when they have more than once changed not only their profession of faith, but several of their dogmas? Can the unchanging truth of the Divine Scriptures have any truck with such inconstancy? <sup>16</sup>

Though this weird notion of the "Bible and the Bible only" is more particularly the child of the Reformation which elevated it to the rank of a dogma, yet it has been the hall-mark of all heresies. Thus at the famous Conference between the Catholics and the Donatists held at Carthage in A.D. 411 the Donatist Bishops demanded that appeal should be made to Scripture only, "to the Old Testament and the New, which God instituted, which Christ consecrated." <sup>16</sup> The same feature appears throughout the discussions at Ephesus and Chalcedon where Nestorius and Eutyches endeavoured to show that their heretical tenets were the plain sense of Scripture. <sup>17</sup>

Sir Thomas More faces the whole question in his *Dialogue concerning Tyndale*. He makes his opponent concede that if Scripture is to be the sole rule of faith, then it must be rightly understood, and that this can only be due to chance, or reason, or grace. The two former are eliminated, for chance is absurd, and "reason may between divers texts stand in great doubt which way to lean." From this Sir Thomas concludes:

<sup>16</sup> Given in Baronius, *Annals* XXI, *Anno* 1540, No. 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Gesta Collationis* i. 31, Mansi, *Concilia* IV. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* V. 500-501.

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I think that God with His Holy Spirit leadeth His Church into the consent of His truth. As He Himself said that the Holy Ghost whom He would send should lead them into all truth. He said not the Holy Ghost should at His coming write them all truth, nor tell them all the truth by mouth, but that He should by secret inspiration lead them into all truth. And therefore, surely, for a true conclusion in such means by God Himself, by the help of His grace, the right understanding of Scripture is ever preserved in His Church from all such mistaking, whereof might follow any damnable error concerning the faith. And therefore doth there first follow, that beside the Scripture self, there is another present assistance, and special care of God, perpetual with His Church, to keep it in the right faith, that it err not by misunderstanding of Holy Scripture. [These things, he concludes,] seem to me as true as two points, as plain to a Christian man, as any petition of Euclid's geometry is to a reasonable man.<sup>18</sup>

More then goes on to show that, whereas a pagan must perforce come to the Scriptures "from without" and in a spirit of enquiry, "without faith," yet this is not true of everybody. Take the case, he says, of "the boy that we christened right now, and taught him his creed and set him to scripture, were it need that this child knew no more of his faith but his creed before he go to the scripture?" The absurdity of such a procedure is well shown by two such texts as "Ye are gods and all of you sons of the Most High," and "Men and beasts wilt thou save, O God"; More shows what pitfalls here lie and that nothing in the Creed will extricate one thence.<sup>19</sup>

Later on in the *Dialogue* More opens his mind very plainly on the desirability of having the Scriptures accessible to all in English with, however, certain practical safeguards.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Dialogue* i. 24; *cp. ibid.*, i. 29, 31; iii. i.

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Many, he remarks, could profitably read Matthew, Mark and Luke, who would yet find John a difficulty; many could read Acts who should not be allowed to read the Apocalypse; while Ephesians would prove profitable to folk who would find stumbling-blocks in Romans.<sup>20</sup> He then gives a very beautiful account of what was presumably his own practice in reading the Bible:

If we would . . . but well and devoutly read it, and, in that it is plain and evident as God's commandments and his holy counsels, endeavour ourself to follow with help of his grace, asked thereunto; and in his great and marvellous miracles consider his godhead; and in his lowly birth, his godly life, and his bitter passion, exercise ourself in such meditations, prayer, and virtues, as the matter shall minister us occasion, knowledging our own ignorance where we find a doubt, and therein leaning to the faith of the church, wrestle with no such texts as might bring us in a doubt and perplexity of any of those articles wherein every good Christian man is clear. By this manner of reading can no man nor woman take hurt in holy scripture.

He then shows how difficult and profound is Scripture, and concludes:

Therefore I can in no wise agree that it were meet for men unlearned to be busy with the chammung [chewing] of holy scripture, but to have it chammed unto them. For that is the preacher's part, and theirs that after long study are admitted to read and expound it.<sup>21</sup>

Astonishment is sometimes expressed at the strong language used by the Church in her condemnations of heretical ver-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



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sions of Scripture; it is not always easy to understand, for example, why Tyndale's version should be described by Bishop Westcott as "most nobly conceived and executed,"<sup>22</sup> but by the Church of Rome as "pestilential."<sup>23</sup> The truth of course is that the Church does not look at the beauty and dignity of a translation of the Bible so much as at its accuracy. Nor does she judge of accuracy according to the ordinary standards but solely by the standard of doctrine. To her every translation which minimises or whittles away a point of doctrine is "pestilential." Now there is no evading the fact that the Reformers translated with a view to the elimination of doctrines against which they had already made up their minds. Thus Sir Thomas More, who had made a most diligent study of the works of Luther and Tyndale, declares that "Whoso calleth it [Tyndale's version of the New Testament] the new testament calleth it by a wrong name, except they will call it Tyndale's Testament or Luther's Testament. For so had Tyndale, after Luther's counsel, corrupted and changed it from the good and wholesome doctrine of Christ, to the devilish heresies of their own, that it was a clean contrary thing." He adds that "there were noted wrong and falsely translated above a thousand texts"; as samples he takes the three words "priest," "Church" and "charity," which Tyndale renders "senior," "congregation" and "love"<sup>24</sup>—trifling changes as far as the language is concerned; radical and fundamental for the doctrinal positions involved. By similar renderings Tyndale contrives to get rid of "grace," "confession," "penance" and "contrition"; he thus led the way to the abolishing of the Mass, of the Sacraments, of veneration of Saints, of Purgatory, etc.<sup>25</sup> The curious reader will do well to study Luther's render-

<sup>22</sup> *The Bible in the Church*, p. 282.

<sup>23</sup> Leo XII, see Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, Nos. 1607-8.

<sup>24</sup> *Dialogue* iii. 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 2-5.



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ings of such passages as I Cor. ix. 5, I Tim. iii. 11-12, Rom. iii. 28. This latter passage is noteworthy: in order to support his cardinal doctrine that "faith alone saves us," Luther has deliberately added "alone through faith"; he has done the same in Rom. iv. 6, where he has, "As also David saith, that happiness is that man's *alone* to whom God reputeth justice without *performing* works."<sup>26</sup>

Can there be any doubt that the Church which is "the pillar and ground of truth," rightly condemns such mis-translations? Not without reason does the Church address to such men the same terrible condemnation addressed to Leo the Isaurian by Pope Gregory II in A.D. 726:

You have repudiated and rejected our Holy Fathers and Doctors and thrown them out, despite the fact that we have your promise in your own handwriting that you would obey them. Now our Scriptures are our light and our salvation; the Holy Fathers and Doctors, filled with God, are ours, also what the six Synods have handed down to us in Christ; yet you refuse their testimony. We are driven to write these crude and elementary things to you for it is you who are crude and elementary; yet these crude and elementary things do contain the truth and power of God.<sup>27</sup>

The plain truth is that the history of the translation of the Bible into English at the Reformation forms a somewhat sordid story. The impression had been assiduously fostered that the clergy had kept any real knowledge of the Scriptures from the people. But the only discoverable confirmation of this notion is to be found in the fact that the clergy had not taken advantage of the printing-press to provide people with a version in the vernacular. In this they were

<sup>26</sup> See Cardinal Wiseman, *Dublin Review*, July, 1836.

<sup>27</sup> Baronius, *Annals* IX. 65, *Anno* 726.

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certainly dilatory. Yet we can readily understand their delay. The times were in a ferment; and though up till the invention of printing those who could read had all they wanted in the Latin versions, it was but natural that with the spread of revolutionary ideas which were rife on the Continent and were rapidly finding their way into England, men who had till then betrayed no interest in such questions were now asking what the Bible really did teach.

The time was ripe for a readily accessible English version, and it would be an injustice to the Bishops to suppose that they did not realise this to the full. Tyndale merely anticipated them; by so doing he made it all the more difficult for the Bishops to bring out promptly a version which should meet the case. Sir Thomas More tells quite categorically, in 1529, that Henry VIII had it in mind as early as 1520 when he wrote his treatise against Luther "to move this matter (of a translation) unto the prelates of the clergy (among whom I have perceived some of the greatest and the best of their minds well inclinable thereto already) that we lay people shall in this matter ere long time pass, except the fault be found in ourself, be well and fully satisfied and content."<sup>28</sup>

As a matter of fact, we have the actual petition of the Bishops on the subject:

On the nineteenth day of December, in the year of the Lord, one thousand, five hundred and thirty-four, the Bishops, Abbots and Priors of the upper house of Convocation, unanimously agreed . . . the king's majesty should think fit to decree that the holy scripture shall be translated into the vulgar English tongue by certain upright and learned men to be named by the said most illustrious king, and be meted out and delivered to the people for their instruction.

<sup>28</sup> *Dialogue* iii. 16.

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But too late had the Bishops awakened to the danger. There is pathos in the earlier clauses of this petition wherein they beg for legislation against the flood of "suspected doctrine"; still greater pathos in the closing words:

That his royal majesty should think fit to forbid and command, with a penalty assigned and imposed, that no layman or secular person among his subjects should for the future presume publicly to dispute or in any manner to wrangle concerning the Catholic faith, or the articles of faith, the Holy Scripture or its meaning.<sup>29</sup>

They were too late. Tyndale and Luther had done their work and the Bishops' efforts were in vain. But were their protests justified? Do they not afford proof of that intolerant attitude towards the Bible in the vernacular which has ever since that day been attributed to them?

On this point we cannot do better than give Sir Thomas More's words. He had made a detailed examination of Luther's writings as well as those of Tyndale. Of the latter he says:

His books be nothing else, in effect, but the worst heresies picked out of Luther's works, and Luther's worst words translated by Tyndale and put forth in Tyndale's own name. . . . He doth in his frantic book of obedience (wherein he railleth at large against all Popes, against all Kings, against all prelates, all priests, all religious, all the laws, all the saints, against the sacraments of Christ's Church, against all virtuous works, against all divine service) and finally against all things in effect that good is.<sup>30</sup>

Of Wyclif's translation of the New Testament More says:

<sup>29</sup> Wilkins, *Concilia* III. 776.      <sup>30</sup> *Dialogue* iii. 13.

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He purposely corrupted the holy text, maliciously planting therein such words as might in the reader's ears serve to the proof of such heresies as he went about to sow; which he not only set forth with his own translation of the Bible, but also with certain prologues and glosses which he made thereon.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly of the manuscripts left by Richard Hunne, at whose trial More assisted:

There lay his English Bible open . . . that every man might see the places noted with his own hand, such words and in such wise, that there would be no wise man, that good were, have any great doubt, after the sight thereof, what naughty minds the men had, both he that so noted them, and he that so made them. . . . Besides other things, framed for the favour of divers other heresies, there were in the prologue of that Bible such words touching the Blessed Sacrament as good Christian men did much abhor to hear.<sup>32</sup>

More then undertakes a detailed investigation of Luther's teachings; <sup>33</sup> he has no hesitation in calling them the well-advised work of the devil. Of Tyndale, too, More tells us that he wantonly and lyingly accused the clergy of breaking the seal of Confession.<sup>34</sup> Lastly, More concludes that of all the heresies "that ever sprang in Christ's Church, the very worst and the most beastly, be these Lutherans, as their opinions and their lewd living showeth."<sup>35</sup> The outcome of all this can only be, he feels, the extinction of all true devotion.<sup>36</sup>

No one at all acquainted with More's character, with his

<sup>31</sup> *Dialogue* iii. 14.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 1, 11-12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 2.



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keen sense of the very real evils of the time, and with his eager desire for reform, can cavil at his denunciations of Luther and Tyndale as the product of a biassed mind. Ambassador, Chancellor, judge, courtier, man of letters with an European fame, shortly to suffer poverty, disgrace and finally death itself for conscience' sake, he was not the man to indulge in spleen or ill-timed invective.

Before we leave this subject it is well for us to realise that the translations of the Bible which More thus condemned sprang from heretical views, and were meant to further their propagation. Hence they were poisoned in their very source. Moreover, the translations were hastily made, and the various editions of Coverdale, Matthew, Taverner and Whittingham, with the "Great" Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the "Bishops" Bible, culminating in the Authorised Version of 1611, and its revision in 1881-1885, were really endeavours to correct what had been ill done through haste.

We may feel inclined to blame the Bishops in the days of Henry VIII for their dilatoriness in bringing out an English version for the people; but they had at least this excuse, that such a task could not be lightly undertaken, as the whole history of these English translations shows.

The difficulty of adequate translation is a commonplace one, as the quotation of St. Jerome's words in the *Constitution* of Oxford shows.<sup>87</sup> Note St. Basil's words on the subject:

I marvel that you look for grammatical subtlety in Scripture, and that you find its diction forced. Remember that a translation uses words which, while quite correct in that idiom, are not precisely what is strictly and rigidly meant by the Hebrew words. [And a little further on.] Apply your mind, then, very dili-

<sup>87</sup> See *supra*, p. 52.



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gently to Holy Scripture and you will find there the answer to the question [you put].

After all, what has the Church done but watch over the translation of the Bible? And who shall blame her for this? What capital would have been made out of any failure on her part in this respect! And, at the risk of wearisome repetition, we must say it again and again: No one can adduce any Decree of the Church forbidding the use of the Bible in the vernacular, *because* it is the vernacular, but solely because it is either badly done or done without authority or with intent to weaken the Church's authority. Similarly, no one can adduce a single passage showing that the Church dreaded the Bible in the vernacular because she feared lest men should discover the hollowness of her claims, though this is a commonplace of controversialists.

The nearest approach to any such pronouncement is to be found in the following, though even here the reasons alleged for "keeping the Bible secret" are readily intelligible.

Wratislaus of Bohemia petitioned the Holy See for leave to have the Divine Offices celebrated in the Slavonic tongue; but Pope Gregory VII, Hildebrand, refused permission:

The more I reflect upon it the more clear it seems to me that rightly does Almighty God prefer that in certain places the Bible should be kept secret, lest if it were made known to everybody, men should hold it cheap and treat it with contempt; or lest, through being misunderstood by the uneducated, it should lead men into error. Nor should it be argued that certain holy men<sup>38</sup> have in the past put up with a practice or declined to correct it when the populace asked for such a thing in all simplicity; for the primitive Church

<sup>38</sup> Hildebrand is, of course, referring to St. Cyril and St. Methodius; see the discussion at Trent, March 1, 1546, *Diaria* V. 25.

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winked at many things, which later on the Fathers—when Christianity was well-established and religion had grown—corrected after due investigation.<sup>39</sup>

It is in perfect accordance with such principles that, as Baronius remarks, in Navarre the French version of the Psalter by Theodore Beza had to be prohibited, “partly because that version was corrupt—it contained grave errors; partly because the apostasy from the Church of Rome—which sings the Psalms in Latin—began with the appearance of that version.”<sup>40</sup>

In the protracted discussions at Trent<sup>41</sup> during the General Congregation held on March 1, 1546, it was repeatedly declared that translations in the vernacular could never be regarded as an abuse, though it was freely conceded that in Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella had been compelled to enact the severest penalties against those who make such translations; but this was owing to the ravages of the Albigenses who made such capital out of their corrupt versions.

Thus one Bishop said:

I cannot consider it an “abuse” [the discussion was about “abuses” in the use of the Bible] that there should be so many [Latin] editions of the Bible, when, that is, some translators render it word for word, others sense for sense, others again in different fashion; for the same words often have different meanings. Nor do I think that we ought therefore to decree the production of a new edition to be published with the Council’s approval, though I would agree that the Vulgate or “received” edition should be corrected.

The Cardinal of Trent, who was President, spoke even more emphatically on the point.

<sup>39</sup> Baronius, *Annals* XI. 537, *Anno* 1080.

<sup>40</sup> *Annals* XXII, *Anno* 1558, No. 15; cf. *ib.* *Anno* 1560, No. 48.

<sup>41</sup> See the following chapter.

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It seems to me unquestionable that we ought never to concede that translating the Bible into our mother-tongue should be reckoned an abuse. What would our adversaries say if they learned that we wanted to pluck from men's hands that Bible which St. Paul so often reminds us should never be far from our hearts? . . . I wish there never had been any Professors of Hebrew and Greek in Germany! We should have been saved all this trouble and unhappy Germany would not have fallen into such wretched heresies. Heresies and such-like evil products do not spring from simple folk who only speak their mother-tongue. That is why I beg that we may never dream of counting it an abuse [to have the Bible in the vernacular]; that should be beyond controversy.<sup>42</sup>

That Luther "found" the Bible at Erfurt about 1507, that he was one of the first to translate it from the Hebrew, that his translation was a revelation to Europe, etc., these are fictions which have been exploded long ago.

In the Caxton Exhibition of 1877, there were no less than nine German editions of the Bible dating before 1483, the year Luther was born, while at least eighteen other pre-Lutheran editions are known. The same applies to French, Italian, and even Spanish Bibles. A French translation of the New Testament appeared in 1478, two more before 1487; the last of these passed through sixteen editions by 1547. Another translation, made between 1512 and 1541, passed through more than forty editions before 1700. In Italy a translation had already been made in 1421; it, with two other translations, was printed in 1471; eleven editions had appeared by 1500, and it had been reprinted eight times with Papal approval before 1567. In 1532 appeared a translation by Bruccioli; this, though very inaccurate, went

<sup>42</sup> *Diaria* V. 25, 30-31.

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into ten editions in twenty years, was then formally condemned for its inaccuracy, revised—in effect re-translated—by Santes Marmoschini, O. P., in 1538, and re-edited in 1546 and 1547. The first Protestant Italian Bible—practically a reprint of Marmoschini's edition—appeared in 1562, by which time more than forty editions of the Italian Catholic version had already appeared.

Precisely the same facts appear when we pass to Spain. Ferrier translated the whole Bible in 1405; this was printed in 1478, and again in 1515 with the formal consent of the Inquisition. The Gospels and Epistles were translated separately in 1512, and reprinted in 1554, 1601, 1603, 1608 and 1615.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See for further details Cardinal Wiseman, *Dublin Review*, July, 1836.

## CHAPTER VI

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT AND THE BIBLE. THE CANON; TRADITION; INSPIRATION; VERNACULAR VERSION; THE VULGATE. THE VATICAN COUNCIL: REVELATION; TRADITION; INSPIRATION; INTERPRETATION.

THE Council of Trent represented the "Counter-Reformation." The Fathers were faced not only with the apparent breakdown in doctrinal belief which characterised the Reformation period, but also with the attack made on the very foundations of the Faith, namely, Divine Revelation enshrined in the written and the unwritten Word of God, viz. Tradition. Hence, in the General Congregation held on Feb. 8, 1546, for discussion of the material to be presented at the Fourth Session, it was agreed that the first step was to discuss the Canon of the Bible "as the basis of all we are going to treat of; so that we may know, too, on what authorities we establish the dogmas of faith and repudiate the errors of heretics."

To gain some idea of the enormous amount of pains expended it will be well to give the sequence of discussions and meetings:

*On Feb. 8, 1546*, a General Congregation wherein, as we have just seen, the material in general was discussed from 6.00 till midnight.

*Feb. 11.* Discussion on the drawing up of the Canon, 6.00-1.30 A.M.

*Feb. 12.* General Congregation: Should the Canon be presented simply as at the Council of Florence? 6.00 P.M.-midnight.

*Feb. 15.* General Congregation on the same point:



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Should all the books be admitted on the same footing? Should reasons for admitting the Deuterocanonical Books be assigned? Should an anathema be appended against those refusing to admit the Canon thus presented? 5.00-3.00 A.M.

*Feb. 18.* Discussions on Tradition and the prevalent abuses in the use of the Bible, 5.00-10.00 P.M.

*Feb. 20.* Meeting of the "Minor" Theologians, *i.e.* those not Prelates, for the discussion of the same points. The Theologians numbered twenty-seven; 6.00-1.00 A.M.

*Feb. 23.* Three separate Committee meetings. Delegates to be chosen for the framing of the Decree on the Canon and on Tradition. Patristic authorities for Tradition are cited at great length.

*Feb. 26.* General Congregation. Great complaints about the needless length of the discussions. Cardinal Pole demurs at this and insists on the need of full and careful discussion; he carries the Council with him.

*March 1.* Three Committees meet to discuss the abuses, which resolve themselves into: discordant versions, varying interpretations and unqualified preachers. It is suggested that corrected editions of the Hebrew and Greek originals should be brought out. Translations into the vernacular must be done by competent people; in view of the misuse made of vernacular editions by the unlearned it might even be better to allow no vernacular editions.

*March 5.* Meeting of the "Minor" Theologians on the current misuse of the Bible, 4.00-11.00 P.M.

*March 9.* A further meeting and a great discussion on the use of the Bible in the vernacular; this unfortunately has not come down to us, 4.00-9.00 P.M.

*March 17.* General Congregation on the report of the delegates touching abuses in the use of the Bible. These now fall into four groups: (a) The existence of various editions (of the Latin text); the remedy will be to declare one single Latin text "authentic," viz. the

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Vulgate. This does not involve the rejection of the Septuagint, nor of other versions which may help sound interpretation. (6) The corrupt state of many copies of the Vulgate; the remedy will lie in the publication of an officially corrected text. (c) The prevalence of wild and unlicensed interpretations; the remedy will be insistence on the fact that the Church is the sole authoritative interpreter of the Bible. (d) Unauthorised printing of the Bible and the insertion of equally unauthorised notes; the remedy will lie in censorship.

Cardinal Pachecus asked why translation of the Bible into the vernacular was not enumerated among the abuses, but the Cardinal of Trent warmly defended such translations.<sup>1</sup>

*March 18.* The first draft of the Decree on the Canon is presented.

*March 22.* This Decree is read and submitted for discussion.

*March 23.* Discussion in which the above Decree is searchingly criticised. The title to be given to the Psalter—whether, that is, it should be called the Psalms of David or the Davidic Psalter, as also whether iii-iv Esdras and iii-iv Maccabees were to be explicitly excluded, were much debated. It was pointed out that as regards the Canon “our appeal is not to the Jews but to the Church of Rome.” The discussion lasted from 7.00 P.M.-3.00 A.M.

*March 27.* A further General Congregation again examined the Decree on the Canon. It was urged that disputed passages in the New Testament, e.g. Mk. xvi. 9-12, Lk. xxii. 43-44, and Jn. v. 3-4, vii. 53-viii. 11, should be explicitly mentioned as forming part of the Canon; keen discussion followed on the position assigned to Tradition.

*March 29.* Copies of all points under discussion

<sup>1</sup> *Diaria* I. 42, 44, 514; II. 381.

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were distributed to all the Conciliar Fathers for their examination.

*April 1.* General Congregation for the final discussion of all these points on which the votes of the Fathers were taken, 7.00-11.00 A.M.

*April 3.* General Congregation on abuses in the use of the Bible; primarily on the advisability of declaring the Vulgate alone to be "authentic." Cardinal Pole suggested having an authentic copy of the Hebrew and Greek text as well, but this was negatived; 7.00-12.30 A.M.<sup>a</sup>

*April 5.* A further General Congregation. The Decree on the Canon was read and discussed and voted on again; 7.00-11.00 A.M.

*April 6.* A Special Congregation on the Decree of the Canon. Many urged that the Epistle to the Hebrews should be explicitly declared to be St. Paul's; also that Tobias, Judith, etc., should be pronounced "Canonical by the Church's Canon, not by that of the Hebrews." To which it was at once retorted: "we do not follow the Jewish Canon." Many other points of lesser interest were discussed from 6.00 P.M. till 1.00 A.M.

*April 7.* General Congregation at which, after much discussion, the Decrees on the Vulgate, on unlicensed interpretation of the Bible, and on censorship of the printers, were read and voted on; 7.00 A.M.-midday.

*April 8* saw the opening of the Fourth Session with the formal reading of the Decree on the Canon and Tradition, also on the Vulgate and interpretation of the Bible, as also on censorship of the printers and publishers.

In addition to all this the Council was occupied right on into June with the Decrees on the study of the Bible and

<sup>a</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 381.

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its exposition by preachers. But enough has been given to show that neither time nor pains were spared by the Fathers of Trent when dealing with these grave questions.

The actual Decree on the Canon of the Bible runs as follows:

The Holy, Oecumenical, and General Synod of Trent . . . having ever before its eyes the removal of error and the preservation of the truth of the Gospel in the Church—that Gospel which, promised beforehand through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, first promulgated with His own mouth and then ordered to be preached to every creature by His Apostles, as being the fountain of all saving truth and moral instruction; seeing, moreover, that this truth and instruction is contained in written Books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the Apostles from the very mouth of Christ, or were delivered—as it were by hand—by the Apostles themselves at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; this same Synod, following the example of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with equal devotion and reverence all the Books of both the Old and the New Testaments, since the one God is the Author of both, as also the aforesaid traditions, whether pertaining to faith or to morals, as delivered by the very mouth of Christ or dictated by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in the Catholic Church by the unfailing succession. And lest any doubt should arise as to which are the Books received by this Synod, it has seemed good to append to this Decree a list of them. The following, then, are the Books.

There follows the traditional list of books as given at the Council of Hippo, 393, confirmed at Carthage, 397 and 419,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For the foregoing details see in addition *Concilium Tridentinum, Diariorum, etc., nova Collectio*, Friburg in Bresgau, 1911, Vol. V, containing the *Acta* of Sessions IV-V.



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repeated by Pope Innocent I in 401, and formally restated at the Council of Florence in 1438:

The Holy Roman Church professes that one and the same God is the Author of the Old and of the New Testaments, that is, of the Law and the Prophets and the Gospels; since the holy men of either Testament spoke under the inspiration of the same Spirit; their Books the Church receives and venerates, and they are contained in the following list.

After repeating this Florentine list the Fathers of Trent continue:

If anyone shall not receive these entire Books with all their parts, as they have been wont to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin edition, and whosoever shall knowingly and of set purpose condemn the aforesaid traditions, let him be anathema.

Westcott's judgment on this Decree is interesting:

This fatal Decree, in which the Council, harassed by the fear of lay critics and "grammarians," gave a new aspect to the whole question of the Canon, was ratified by fifty-three prelates, among whom there was not one German, not one scholar distinguished for historical learning, not one who was fitted by special study for the examination of a subject in which the truth could only be determined by the voice of antiquity.<sup>4</sup>

Whether this accords with the enormous labour which, as we have seen, the Tridentine Fathers expended on the subject, we leave our reader to judge.

The Fathers, it will have been noted, had twice pointed

<sup>4</sup> *The Bible in the Church*, 1864, pp. 256-7.



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out that Jewish traditions on the Canon could not be a norm for the Church of Christ.

What an "apostasy" it was, then, when the Reformers deliberately went back to the Jews to discover the true Canon of the Bible. What an insult to the Church of Christ which for fifteen hundred years had held that the Bible comprised other books than those contained between the covers of a Hebrew Bible. The tragedy is that people are taught even to-day that the repudiation of the so-called "Apocrypha," viz. Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and I and II Maccabees was done in the interests of truth, when the Reformers themselves tell us that they repudiated them because of the doctrine they contained. Tobias they repudiated "for that Raphael mentioned in Tobit, neither acknowledge we those seven Angels whereof he makes mention"; so, too, Ecclesiasticus: "Neither will I believe free will, although the book of Ecclesiasticus confirms it an hundred times." <sup>5</sup>

After the Decree on the Canon the Fathers of Trent formulated the Decree on the Vulgate:

The same Holy Synod, feeling that it would be no small gain to the Church of God if it were clearly stated which, of all the Latin editions of the Scriptures which are in circulation, is to be held authentic, hereby declares and enacts that the well-known (*haec ipsa*) old Vulgate edition, which has been proved by its long-continued uses throughout so many centuries in the Church, is, in public conferences, disputations, preach-

<sup>5</sup> Ward's *Errata of the Protestant Bible*, p. 29. This book appeared in 1688, the result of a Protestant's scrutiny of the Protestant versions. Ward takes the principal doctrinal points denied by the Reformers and shows how in the editions of 1562, 1577 and 1579, the translation had been adapted so as to exclude such doctrines; he further shows how the edition of the Authorised Version which appeared in 1683 only partially corrected such errors.

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ings and expositions, to be held as authentic, and that no one is, upon any pretext, to dare or presume to repudiate it.<sup>6</sup>

Few acts of the Church when dealing with the Bible have provoked more ill-natured comment or been less understood. Here is a sample:

Why should it [the Vulgate] yield to old Greek and Hebrew manuscripts which have been in the hands of schismatics and unbelievers for hundred of years? So these wise scholars invented an easy method of textual criticism for themselves. Instead of going to the trouble of comparing the version with the ancient manuscripts, they settled the matter by calmly decreeing in Council that the old Vulgate should be received as "authentic," whatever that may mean, and that it should be the standard version, to which appeal must be made in all matters of controversy.

The same writer then goes on to give the usual ignorant account of the production of the Sixtine edition of the Vulgate:

He [Pope Sixtus V] got together a company of learned revisers, but with this understanding, that their functions were merely to collect manuscripts and prepare the evidence for and against certain readings in the text, after which the Pope himself, by reason not of his scholarship, but of his gift of infallibility, decided straight off which were the genuine words.<sup>7</sup>

It should hardly be necessary to point out that the term "authentic" only means that the version is "substantially" correct. The declaration of the Council refers only to the

<sup>6</sup> *Diaria* V. 91; Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, No. 785.

<sup>7</sup> Paterson Smyth, *The Old Documents and the New Bible*, 3d. ed., 1890, pp. 174-5.

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current Latin versions which consequently are tacitly condemned. Neither does it involve any repudiation of the Hebrew and Greek originals, nor of versions in other tongues, e.g. that of the Septuagint. We have seen that at an early stage of the discussion it was proposed to provide corrected copies of the Hebrew and Septuagint texts.

Throughout the discussions the question of the advisability of having vernacular versions of the Bible kept recurring, and on more than one occasion was fully investigated. The unanimity ultimately reached is all the more interesting from the fact that this was only arrived at by slow degrees. Cardinal Pachecus, a Spaniard, set himself against such versions from the outset, and very disedifying scenes took place between him and Cardinal Madrutius, the Bishop of Trent, on the point. Pachecus, as all his arguments show, was enormously impressed by the flood of heretical teachings which had resulted from the widespread use of versions in the vernacular which afforded all sorts of people free access to the quarry whence the Church as well as her doctrines had been dug. Because these folk did not want the doctrines in question, they taught everywhere, to all and sundry, that there was no trace of them to be found in the quarry. But the views of Pachecus were invariably countered by the Fathers with the principle *abusus non tollit usum*, and this view prevailed.<sup>8</sup>

We may safely say that the action of the Tridentine Fathers with regard to the Canon of the Bible, its inspired character and the principles which should govern and safeguard its interpretation constitute real defence of the Bible; and we confidently assert that the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church stands alone in this respect. She tells her children to study the Bible assiduously, but she makes one proviso:

<sup>8</sup> See *Diaria* I. 42-61, 507-510, 514, 518-521; II. 381; V. 25-30, for the disputes.

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You must remember, she tells them, that the Bible is not yours but mine, for it is my charter. And there are two things about the Bible which I alone, as its Divinely accredited guardian, can tell you: I can tell you which books really belong to the Bible and which do not; I can tell you further that its writers were inspired by the Holy Ghost and therefore are absolutely trustworthy. No one else can tell you that, though many are of the opinion that it is so. I alone can tell you, and I can tell you so infallibly.

This is what St. Augustine means when he says that he would not believe the Bible unless the authority of the Church impelled him thereto.<sup>9</sup> He does not mean that the Bible is so replete with difficulties that he finds it hard to accept it—though that thought is, as the context of the whole passage shows, present to his mind. He means rather that the Bible's claim to be the written record of Divine revelation as to what we men must believe and do if we would gain the Kingdom of Heaven is so prodigious and vital that no reasonable man can accept it save on Divine authority.

Further, in insisting on the inspired character of the Scriptures the Church wishes us to bear in mind a fact which is too often forgotten, namely, that the Bible is not merely literature of the most wonderful kind, but that it is God's literature. Consequently no study of it which neglects or disregards its inspired character can be complete or satisfactory. For a prime factor is being disregarded; much as though a man should study the novels of Besant and Rice and say that he is going to neglect the "Rice" factor in their composition and consider the works solely from the point of view of Besant.

We depend on the Church for the preservation of the

<sup>9</sup> *Contra Epistolam Fundamentalem* V.



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Bible, for a knowledge of what books legitimately form part of it, for certitude regarding their inspiration and its extent, also for definitive interpretation of it when need arises. The Protestant, while claiming that he is absolutely free in his reading and interpretation of it, forgets that he always has to make an act of faith in the translator—unless he is reading the original—and that he depends on the authority of the so-called reformed Churches for his knowledge of the contents of the Canon. Whether any of these bodies would undertake to pronounce definitively on the meaning to be attached to any particular passage is a moot question. There would certainly be an uproar if they did so!

### THE VATICAN COUNCIL

Three hundred and twenty-four years were to elapse before the Church would again assemble in Council and once more declare her unchanging mind on the Bible, its nature, contents, inspiration and interpretation.

On April 24, 1870, the Third Session of the Vatican Council opened with the solemn reading of the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Catholic Faith*. Chapter II dealt with Revelation; after declaring its character the *Constitution* continues:

Moreover this supernatural Revelation is, according to the faith of the Universal Church as declared by the Holy Synod of Trent, contained in written Books and in unwritten traditions which, received from the mouth of Christ by the Apostles, or, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, as it were delivered by hand by the same Apostles, have come down to us. Now the entire Books of the Old and of the New Testament, with all their parts, as they are enumerated in the Decree of the said Council, and as they are contained in the old Vulgate



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Latin edition, are to be received as Sacred and Canonical. Nor does the Church regard them as Sacred and Canonical simply because, fashioned by human industry, she has subsequently given them her authoritative approval, nor again because they contain Revelation with no admixture of error, but because being written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they have God for their Author, and as such have been handed down to the Church.

Since however the Decrees drawn up by the Holy Synod of Trent touching the interpretation of Holy Scripture—Decrees wisely framed with a view to curbing men's impatient minds—have been distorted by certain people, we hereby renew that Decree and declare that the meaning of the Council was that in things of faith and morals, things, that is, touching the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be held as the true meaning of Holy Scripture which Holy Mother Church has held and holds; for it is hers to decide on the true meaning and interpretation of the Bible. Consequently no one is allowed to interpret Holy Scripture contrary to that meaning nor against the unanimous consent of the Fathers.<sup>10</sup>

Can. iv, embodying the above, runs:

If anyone shall not receive as holy and canonical the entire Books of Holy Scripture with all their parts according to the list drawn up by the Holy Synod of Trent, or shall deny that they are Divinely inspired, let him be anathema.<sup>11</sup>

The statement that God is the Author of the Bible, repeated here from Trent<sup>12</sup> and taken by that Council from

<sup>10</sup> *Collectio Lacensis* VII. 251; Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, Nos. 787-8.

<sup>11</sup> *Collectio Lacensis* VII. 255; Denzinger, No. 1809.

<sup>12</sup> Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, No. 783.

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Florence,<sup>13</sup> was also made by Pope Leo IX in A.D. 1053,<sup>14</sup> and found a place in the Profession of Faith drawn up for the Waldenses in A.D. 1208.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly this decision by the Vatican Council is no isolated phenomenon. It is but one more link in the long chain of pronouncements by the Church on the nature, contents and position of the Bible in the Church. The nature of the Bible—it contains revelations without error; the contents—it consists of the following books . . . and Council after Council has enumerated them down the ages in the same terms and with no variations in the list; the position of the Bible—it belongs to the Church, she is its custodian, she alone can interpret it authoritatively. Moreover the Bible is absolutely true. If it is not, then the very Charter on which the Church rests is unreliable, and revelation itself has no guarantor. If you ask the Church what she means when she maintains that the Bible is absolutely true, she is content to answer that it is the “Word of God” and therefore incapable of lying; and when we call it the “Word of God” we mean that it is spoken by Him in the sense that those who committed God’s revelation to writing in the course of the centuries did so under the influence of the Holy Spirit who moved them to write and guided them while so doing. This action of the Holy Spirit, the Church, by the voice of her Doctors throughout the centuries, calls “inspiration.” If, again, you ask in what that “inspiration” consists, the Church will tell you in the words of the Fathers of the Vatican Council, given above, that by it God is the Author of the Bible. But beyond that she will hardly go; for an investigation of the meaning and implications of “authorship” is a question rather of philosophical disquisitions which are not directly the Church’s province.

At the same time Leo XIII, in his Encyclical on Holy

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 706.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 41, 421.

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Scripture, *Providentissimus Deus*, has gone very far to endorse the view held by St. Thomas and his School that the real nature of Inspiration is to be found in the philosophy of instrumental causality.

## CHAPTER VII

DEFENCE OF THE BIBLE BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. THE CON-  
DEMNATION OF QUESNELL. THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE  
SOCIETY. THE MODERNISTIC SPIRIT. ENGLISH EDITIONS OF THE  
CATHOLIC BIBLE. THE ENCYCLICAL OF LEO XIII. THE FORMA-  
TION OF THE BIBLICAL COMMISSION. THE INSTITUTION OF  
BIBLICAL DEGREES AND OF THE BIBLICAL INSTITUTE.

WHILE the Church has been denounced on all sides for her alleged neglect of the Bible and for attempting to keep it from the laity, she is no less emphatically condemned when she passes censures on those of her children who exceed due bounds in their interpretation of Scripture. More remarkable still, the more she does to encourage the study of the Bible the more she is met with sneers and contempt.

Let us take first some of the censures the Church has passed on Biblical scholars of her own fold.

Here are the various "condemned propositions" containing the errors of Quesnell, the Jansenist, who died in 1719:

No. 79. It is useful and necessary for all persons, in every age and place, to study and know the spirit, piety, and mysteries of Holy Scripture.

No. 80. The reading of the Holy Scripture is for everybody.

No. 81. The holy obscurity in which the Word of God is shrouded is no reason why the laity should dispense themselves from reading it.

No. 82. The Lord's Day should be sanctified by Christians by pious reading, especially of the Bible. It is a dangerous thing to try and keep Christians from such reading.

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No. 85. To forbid Christians the reading of the Bible, especially the Gospels, means forbidding "the children of the light" to use the light; it is tantamount to excommunicating them.

No. 86. To deprive simple folk of the consolation of joining their voices with the voice of the entire Church is contrary to Apostolic practice and the mind of God.<sup>1</sup>

Plainly Quesnell was not thus condemned because he urged folk to read the Bible, but because he made it a necessity for salvation; as though the invention of printing had made the problem of our salvation more complicated!

A few years later, in 1803, Pius VII felt compelled to protest against the way in which Bibles in the vernacular were being spread broadcast. He reminds the Archbishop of Mayence, to whom he is writing, that the Council of Trent had laid down that only such versions should be permitted as were provided with notes from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, "lest such a treasure [as the Bible] should suffer corruption from novel teachings, and in order that the Church spread throughout the world should be of one tongue and one speech."

We are all familiar [he continues] with the way in which the vernacular tongues vary and fluctuate; we fear, then, lest owing to indiscriminate license in the use of translations of the Bible that unchangeableness which is so pronounced a feature of the Divine message should disappear and the faith itself be endangered, more especially when we realise that by changing but a single syllable a dogmatic truth may be obscured. . . . We have all witnessed the sad spectacle of men of great learning and holiness who yet have gone astray in their

<sup>1</sup> Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, Nos. 1429-1436. The same was repeated in substance by Pius VI in the Bull *Auctorem fidei*, 1794, *ibid.*, No. 1567.



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interpretation of the Bible. How much greater reason, then, to fear if the Bible is handed indiscriminately, and in all sorts of languages, to uneducated people who do not as a rule decide with caution, but rather with rashness.<sup>2</sup>

The same arguments were used by Leo XII when, in 1824, he lamented the unwise efforts of the Bible Society: "If the Bible is everywhere permitted in the vernacular without discrimination, then more loss than profit will result owing to men's rashness. The truth of this daily experience shows."<sup>3</sup>

Can any man in his senses deny the justice of this?

In 1844 Gregory XVI felt bound to renew these protests against the activities of the Bible Societies. These Societies, he says:

—never cease to publish calumnies against the Chair of Peter on the alleged ground that for several centuries past this See has striven to keep people from knowing the Bible; as though there did not exist the clearest and most earnest pronouncements on the part of the Supreme Pontiffs even in these latter years . . . in which they urge the Catholic laity seriously to study the Word of God, whether written or handed down.

The Pope then points out that at Trent it was decided that:

—translations of the Bible were only to be permitted to those who were adjudged likely to grow in faith and piety therefrom . . . to which provision there was added by Benedict XIV a declaration that the reading of the Bible in the vernacular was permissible to the faithful if such translations were approved by the

<sup>2</sup> Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, Nos. 1602-1606.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 1607-8.

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Apostolic See, or furnished with notes derived from the Fathers and Doctors of the Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup>

That the Roman Pontiffs should condemn the Bible Society with which the Catholic Church has nothing directly to do may come as a surprise. But some small realisation of the activities of the Society at the opening of the nineteenth century will make it clear why such action was taken. The Protestant Italian version of the New Testament was published by Diodati in 1607. It is in beautiful Italian but full of explanatory notes in italics. Many of these are intended to be subversive of Catholic doctrines and are all the more dangerous in that they are suggestive rather than positive. Let anyone interested in the matter examine in Diodati such passages as Heb. x. 10, a hit at the Mass; Matt. xix. 11, a dig at celibacy, etc. Now the Bible Society did all in its power to get this edition in circulation throughout Italy. Copies were printed in England without name or date, and carefully got up in Italian fashion. Is it to be wondered, then, that the Holy See took action? How gravely negligent she would have been had she not done so! <sup>5</sup>

At the present time the assault on the Bible has taken on a different form. Modern study of the religions of the primitive world has opened up a whole field of research unknown to our fathers. It has been realised as never before that the Bible is no isolated phenomenon in the world, that the Israelites were anything but a "primitive" people, and that some traditions of the Hebrews have to be sought, or find their parallels, in the faiths of the peoples among whom they lived or from whom they sprang. The more the results of recent archaeological research are studied, the more evident

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 1630-1633.

<sup>5</sup> See Wiseman, *Dublin Review*, *Versions of the Scriptures*, July, 1836, pp. 393-4. It is regrettable that this essay was not reprinted in the collected volumes of the Cardinal's writings.

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it has become that our ideas on "the making of books" in old times need considerable modification. But how dangerous misdirected investigation in this quarter may be will appear from the following propositions condemned in the Decree of the Holy Office, *Lamentabili sane*, July 3, 1907:

1. The Ecclesiastical regulation requiring censorship previous to publication of works dealing with Holy Scripture does not apply to learned critics nor to scientific exegesis of the Old or New Testament.
2. While we cannot afford to despise the Church's interpretation of the Bible yet it should be subject to the more accurate judgment and correction of exegetes.
3. It would appear from Ecclesiastical decisions and pronouncements regarding free and learned exegesis that the faith set before us by the Church is in contradiction to history, and that Catholic dogmas cannot be brought into accord with the real history of the origins of Christianity.
4. The teaching office of the Church is unable to determine even by dogmatic decisions what is the true sense of Scripture.
9. Men who believe that God is really the Author of the Bible betray either a remarkable simplicity or ignorance.
10. The Inspiration of the Books of the Old Testament consists in the fact that the Israelite writers handed down their religious teachings in a certain particular form hardly, if at all, known to the heathen.
11. Divine Inspiration does not so extend to the whole of the Bible as to keep every single portion of it free from error.
12. If a Biblical exegete desires to gain real profit from his study he must put aside all idea of the supernatural origin of the Bible and must interpret it precisely as he would any purely human documents.

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13. The Evangelists themselves, as well as Christians of the second and third generation, devised the Parables of the Gospels as a means of explaining the scanty results of Christ's preaching to the Jews.
14. In many of their narratives the Evangelists have given us not so much true history as things which, though false, they felt would be more useful to their readers.
15. Down to the time when the Canon was finally drawn up and definitely fixed the Gospels continued to grow, owing to additions and corrections; consequently only the scantiest and most shadowy remnants of Christ's teaching remain in them.
16. The narrative in St. John's Gospel is not strictly speaking history, but a mystical contemplation on the "Gospel"; the addresses given in his Gospel are theological meditations on the mysteries of salvation, and are devoid of historical truth.
17. The Fourth Gospel exaggerated the miracles, and this not simply to make them appear more extraordinary but with a view to rendering them still more fit means for showing forth the work and glory of the Incarnate Word.
18. John claims to be himself a witness of Christ; but as a matter of fact he is really only a very remarkable witness to the Christian life, or rather to "life in Christ" at the close of the first century.
19. Non-Catholic exegetes have expressed the true sense of the Bible more faithfully than have Catholic interpreters.\*

Of course this will be dubbed "obscurantism," and so forth; non-Catholics will—in words at least—thank God that they are not so "cribbed, cabined and confined" as their Catholic brethren. But which is the better course—to speak out boldly when the Scriptures are assailed, and say precisely what may be held or not held consistently with sound faith;

\* Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, Nos. 2001-2019.



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or to bow down before the last opinion ventilated by some half-fledged professor who will probably change his mind in a short time? How many wild notions have we seen welcomed as "the last word" on the subject, as one of the "assured results of a free and independent critical spirit"! Yet they live but a few years and are then forgotten. It is surely a significant fact that the Roman Catholic Church stands alone in defending the Bible. She alone dares to tell her children that the following, and the following only, are the books of the Bible, and hurls her anathema at those who question it. She alone has the courage to declare that the Bible contains no error, that every word of it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and is therefore true. Nor is she content with these positive declarations. They would be but idle words unless accompanied by due precautions for safeguarding that study of the Bible which she is ever inculcating in her children but which has, as centuries of experience have proved, its accompanying dangers. Nor is this all. The Church unflinchingly excommunicates those of her children who rebel. The modern anaemic world holds up its hands in horror at such "brutality"; we hear people talking of "poor so and so" "harassed" by the inexorable Church of Rome, driven from one position to another and finally ignominiously expelled from her Communion. The children of the Church cannot but smile when they hear these things, for they well know the months, if not years, of patient handling which have preceded the final step, which alone, as a rule, is known to the outside world.

The sole alternative to such a line of action is to tolerate every opinion however bizarre; to wring one's hands perhaps, but to do—nothing. The result is patent to everyone and it is the result of the dogma of "the open Bible." Hence the innumerable sects, hence "our unhappy divisions," hence the decay of all belief, the repudiation of all dogma, and



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the truly appalling contempt for the Bible which is everywhere manifest. You cannot have "an infallible Bible"—or if you prefer it, an infallible revelation—without an infallible safeguard of it. Abolish the teaching office of the Church and in the long run you abolish the Bible which is its charter, and which depends on the Church for its preservation and interpretation.

It is often urged against the Church that she does little or nothing to make the Bible easily accessible to the people; that Catholic copies of the Bible are cumbersome, none too cheap, and ill-printed. Now it is true that the Church has never forced the Bible on her children, for it is not her sole treasure; the Bible is not a Sacrament, nor is the reading of the Bible; nor, again, is it, as Tertullian has told us, the one Rule of Faith. But is it a fact that the Church has anything to be ashamed of in the Bibles she publishes? The history of the Vulgate Latin Bible is sufficient disproof, and the Vulgate is the official Bible of the Church.

When we turn to editions in the vernacular, the case is somewhat different; we are speaking solely of English Catholic editions.

In 1850 there appeared from the pen of the Rev. Henry Cotton, Archdeacon of Cashel, *Editions of the Bible and Parts thereof in English from the year 1505 to 1850*. This was followed in 1855 by *Rhemes and Douay. An attempt to show what has been done by Roman Catholics for the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures in English*. These most useful volumes are remarkable, however, for the animus they show against the Roman Catholic Church, and her reputed treatment of the Bible. In the opening chapter of the latter volume Dr. Cotton says he will not discuss the Church's "*policy* of placing restrictions on the perusal of God's written Word, or on the *motives* . . . the *fact* is a matter of history. . . . The principle, that Vernacular translations . . . are

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not necessary for the Laity, and ought not to be conceded to them without the express permission of a bishop or priest, has long been a recognised dogma of that Church." He then quotes a declaration of the Provincial Council of Toulouse, held in 1229.

But the facts relating to this Council are very simple. Though a Provincial Council only, it was held under a Cardinal Legate of the Apostolic See; it was solely concerned with the measures to be taken for the reconciliation of the immense numbers of people who were returning to the Church after the ravages of the Albigensian heresy in the districts of Toulouse, Narbonne and Carcassonne. Much harm had been done by rash and wholly unauthorised interpretations of the Bible. Consequently Can. xiv says:

We prohibit the laity from having the Books of the Old or the New Testament except, it may be that out of devotion some desire to have the Psalter or the Breviary for the Divine Office, or the *Hours* of the Blessed Virgin. And we most strictly prohibit them from having the aforesaid Books translated into the vernacular.<sup>7</sup>

The same feature reappears in these and in all similar enactments: it is not the Bible that is condemned, nor the use of it, but the abuse of it. To take a homely illustration: Let some person of foreign extraction naturalised in England or the States be found translating into his own tongue the charters of liberties of either State, and doing so inaccurately in the judgment of those States, adding moreover notes calculated to subvert the State in question—would he not promptly and rightly find himself called to account? And if this were to become a widespread practice resulting

<sup>7</sup> Mansi, *Concilia* XXIII. The forty-five Canons of this Council are only to be found in the recent edition of Mansi; they do not appear in the *Supplement* to the older edition.

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in dissatisfaction, would the State in question be doing its duty if it failed to suppress such translation? It is precisely the same with the Church and its charter, the Bible.

Cotton then repeats the canard that "the jealousy of the Papal Court" delayed the publication of the New Testament volume of the *Complutensian Polyglott* from 1514 to 1522. This brings the author to the Reformation when "the struggle for possession of the Holy Volume, which had long been going on in various quarters, came to its height . . . both parties well knew, that nothing had so powerfully contributed to detach men from their implicit allegiance to Rome as the perusal of God's written Word." Finally he quotes a number of passages from Catholic writers—Dr. Doyle, Dr. Milner, Richard Lalor Shiel and Cardinal Wiseman—everyone of whom gives him, in the very words he himself quotes, the perfectly simple answer which would have saved him a great deal of rhetoric: The Catholic Church does not allow the laity in general to read the Bible in the vernacular without explanatory notes. Of course if you are not a Catholic, but want to find out what the Bible has to say to what you fancy to be the preposterous claims of Rome, you can read the Bible in the original or in any version you like. You are not a Catholic, not one of the Church's children; her laws, then, have nothing to do with you. But if what Dr. Cotton is fond of calling the "perusal" of the Bible should lead you to the Catholic Church, and you elect to become one of her children, the Church will say: "You have come to a knowledge of me through the Bible, now I will show you how to gain the Kingdom of heaven by reading the Bible; in other words, I will show you what you must believe, and what you must do, if you would please God and not simply yourself."

All this is to be found in the answers which Dr. Cotton cites from Catholic writers; yet he cannot see it—presum-

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ably because he does not want to do so. Can anyone deny the common sense of such teaching? We fancy it is compelling.

Cardinal Newman's comment on Dr. Cotton's work is characteristic:

He has made it [his book] the vehicle of so much incidental insinuation, sometimes unfair, sometimes ignorant, always ill-natured, to the disadvantage of Catholic ecclesiastics, that we are unable to regard him with that unmixed respect, and to use him with that ready and unfaltering confidence, which would be natural in those who, like ourselves, have long known his claims, both as a gentleman and as a scholar, on public estimation.<sup>8</sup>

The fallacy underlying all this demand for unrestrained reading of the Bible is that such reading is necessary for salvation. What were folk to do when there was no written record of God's revelation passes comprehension. And what about the poor?

It has been calculated that the cost of copying the entire Bible at the present day, in engrossing hand and on parchment, would be more than £200 sterling.<sup>9</sup> When we reflect that, until the invention of printing, none but manuscript Bibles were to be had, we have the very best proof that Christ never meant men of all classes, rich and poor, educated and uneducated alike, to read the Bible, still less to find in it alone the way of salvation. Indeed the very notion of such a thing is contradicted by the Bible itself. The Law was given in a few hours; how many centuries did it take to

<sup>8</sup> *Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical*, pp. 405-445, a reprint of a paper in the *Rambler* for July, 1859, on the *Text of the Rheims and Douay Version of the Holy Scripture*.

<sup>9</sup> Buckingham, *The Bible in the Middle Ages*, 1853, p. 2; Maitland, *The Dark Ages*, 202.



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commit God's revelation to writing? What was to be done in the interval if the Bible alone was to be men's guide? It is the same with the New Testament; Christ taught for some three brief years, but seventy more had to elapse before the record of that revelation was fully committed to writing.

Nowhere in the Bible is the study of Scripture urged upon Christians as the necessary means of salvation. The Jews are indeed exhorted to "search" the Scriptures in order to discover therein the characteristics of the Messiah when He should come,<sup>10</sup> and the Jews of Berea are specially commended for so doing.<sup>11</sup> But we Christians are merely told that the Scriptures are our comfort, also that all inspired Scripture is profitable for those who would be perfect. It is in accordance with this that Origen—whose labours on the Bible and its interpretation have never been rivalled—points out that the Bible only furnishes us with the briefest possible introduction to the elements of saving knowledge.<sup>12</sup> How pregnant St. Peter's lament that already "the unlearned and the unstable wrest to their own destruction" St. Paul's Epistles as "also the other Scriptures."<sup>13</sup> Yet the Church which claims to be founded on Peter is to do nothing to safeguard her children in their reading of the Bible! She is to let them have translations made by anybody; she is to abstain from inserting notes to guide men in reading difficult passages; she is to claim no right to watch over the use the faithful make of it; least of all is she to exercise any right to interpret it officially! The position thus envisaged is so ridiculous that it is hard to believe that men who hold such ideas have ever really thought them out.

Would anyone, whose official position did not in some sort compel him to do so, defend the doctrine of "the open

<sup>10</sup> Jn. v. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Acts xvii. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Tom. XIII. 2 in *Joann.*

<sup>13</sup> II Pet. iii. 15-16.



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Bible" nowadays? Can anyone honestly say that the criticism to which the Bible has been so ruthlessly subjected since the Reformation has really been for the spiritual profit of Christendom? Let us face facts as fearlessly as we can. In the first place, "the open Bible," with absolutely free and untrammelled interpretation of it by all and sundry, by the educated and uneducated alike, is unquestionably the cause of our "present unhappy divisions." Is there a religious sect which does not base its claims on the Bible? A further consequence is that all belief in the inspiration of the Bible has vanished. How many people believe now that God is literally the Author of every word in the Bible? A still further consequence, there is not a single doctrine which has escaped unscathed. Men reject the immortality of the soul, because, forsooth, it is nowhere stated in categorical terms in the Bible! Original sin has gone long ago, and with it any sound belief in Baptismal regeneration. Who believes in an eternal hell, despite our Lord's positive words? Nor is it merely the "unlearned" who "wrest" the Scriptures on these points, it is far more the "unstable" in the high places. As for Biblical history as our fathers understood it—well, it no longer exists. We are no longer to talk of "the Law and the Prophets," but "the Prophets and the Law," for—so the critics tell us—what we have been content for some eighteen hundred years to regard as the Law of Moses is really the product of the eighth and subsequent centuries before Christ. And what are we to make of the frame of mind which calmly assures us that we are all the better for this? That, in some fashion which no one ever explains, we have "come into our inheritance," have secured "a larger comprehension" of the Divine message than was hitherto possible? Is there any other word for this but "hypocrisy"? We fear not. The truth is simple, and because it is so simple we jib at it: an infallible revelation without an infallible interpreter and

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safeguard of it is an anomaly. But the anomalous idea is the inevitable outcome of the "open Bible."

To return for a moment to Dr. Cotton. What are the facts revealed by his pages? He has drawn up lists of all the Catholic editions of the English Bible which appeared between 1582 and 1854, and his whole tone is one of persistent disparagement. Yet he shows himself completely ignorant of the real meaning of the penal times; he forgets the disabilities under which Catholics have so long lived, and which are only now disappearing. As a matter of fact, no Catholic can study Dr. Cotton's lists without feeling a glow of pride in the amazing work accomplished by our forefathers in providing copies of the Bible for their people. During the period indicated seventy editions—or at least reimpressions—of the New Testament appeared, four of the Old Testament alone, forty-one of the entire Bible. Such facts speak for themselves.

In 1893 appeared the Encyclical of Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, on the study of Holy Scripture. The Pope urged upon the clergy the necessity of assiduous study of the Bible, the virulent assaults on which seemed to grow in intensity year by year. More particularly did he insist on the Divine Authorship of the Bible, and consequently upon its inspired character. Of course the Pope was attacked and told that his ideas were "impossible"; even now, after more than thirty years, a student of the Bible like Dr. Gore can speak of "this amazing Encyclical" and express a devout hope that "this assertion of verbal inspiration in its most stringent sense as the doctrine of the Church" may not be infallible. But attacks on the Encyclical were insignificant compared to the storm of abuse which was showered on the Biblical Commission which the same Pontiff inaugurated in 1902, and which published its first Decisions, on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, in 1906.

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There is a certain irony in the position. The Roman Church suppresses the Bible: anathema to her! The Roman Church defends the Bible: anathema to her! The Roman Church says the critics have gone too far: What does she know about it? Catholics do not know the Bible! Besides they are so fettered that they cannot think freely on points of criticism.

It is the same ever-recurring problem: Do you approach the Bible as the sole source of information on God's design for us men; or has your reading of the Bible led you to a Church which the Author of the Bible instituted as the safeguard and custodian of His revelation which was partially, if not wholly, enshrined in the Bible? No thinking person can seriously defend the former position, while acceptance of the latter means acceptance of the Church's ruling about the Bible and its interpretation. The former position has led to the steady and persistent disintegration of the Bible, with consequent disbelief in revelation itself; the latter position results in the anomaly that the only Church which really upholds the Bible now—just as through the centuries preceding the Reformation—is the Church which has always been denounced for neglect of it!

As the Decisions of the Biblical Commission have caused much heart-burning, it may be well to draw attention to the following points:

(a) The declarations of the Commission are not "definitions" but decisions.

(b) These decisions have not the remotest claim to be considered infallible; nor do the questions of authenticity belong per se to the Deposit of faith. Nor, again, are these decisions "irreformable"; they may, that is, be reversed in the light of fuller knowledge.

(c) They are legal and doctrinal pronouncements to which we must submit; but they have to be read and

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studied as such. Hence they have to be interpreted strictly; the only thing that matters is what the decision actually, rigidly contains; its implications and its silences are beside the question.

(d) But these decisions do represent the mind of the Church: hence while we cannot give to them the assent of faith—for that is solely concerned with revealed truths—we are bound by our acceptance of the “ordinary teaching-office of the Church” (*quotidianum magisterium*) as well as by the laws of common sense to give to them an interior assent as well as exterior, bearing in mind that because a statement is not infallibly true it is not therefore probably false.

Nor was the formation of the Biblical Commission the last step. In his Encyclical, *Scripturae Sanctae*, published in 1904, Pius X carried forward his predecessor's designs and instituted the Degrees of Biblical Licentiate and Doctorate. Briefly: before anyone can become a candidate for these degrees he must have passed his Doctorate in Theology; the Licentiate demands a very solid knowledge of Hebrew and Biblical Greek, also of the whole Bible, its history, contents and the main critical questions centring round each book. For the Doctorate the candidate must show a real acquaintance with Patristic exegesis, must present a substantial book on some critical question, and must have a good working knowledge of some other Oriental language besides Hebrew. The examinations for both degrees are conducted *viva voce* as well as in writing.

Long before the institution of the Biblical Commission there had been inaugurated at Jerusalem under the Dominican Fathers the famous École Biblique, which started in 1890 and which has since published quarterly the highly scientific *Révue Biblique*. The École has also produced the well-known Commentaries by Père Lagrange, Père Dhorme, Père Condamin, etc. The last step in conjunction with the



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formation of the Biblical Commission was the inauguration at Rome of the Biblical Institute, or School for Biblical Studies, under the direction of the Jesuits.

To conclude: We depend on the Church for the preservation of the Bible, a knowledge of what books legitimately form part of it, for certitude regarding their inspiration and its extent, also for definitive interpretation of it when need arises. The Protestant, while claiming that he is absolutely free in his reading and interpretation of it, forgets that he always has to make an act of faith in the translator—unless he is reading the original—and that he depends on the authority of the so-called Reformed churches for his knowledge of the contents of the Canon.

But this they should bear in mind: without the Catholic Church there would be no Bible in existence. When the "Higher Critic" at one extreme wreaks his fancy on it he owes the very object of his skill in dissection to the Catholic Church; when the Bible is finally rescued from his destructive talons it will be by a knight-errant called the Catholic Church; when the various sects at the other extreme exploit the Bible and demand "the Bible and the Bible only" as the basis of all Christianity, they are forgetting that it is only from the Catholic Church they learn what are the contents of that very Bible whose claims they are urging.

Finally, all who pin their faith to the Bible as containing God's revelation must remember that the dogma of its inspiration—which alone gives validity to our belief in the Bible—has been held and taught in the Catholic Church alone down the centuries, and that she alone claims to give us reasonable guarantees for our belief.





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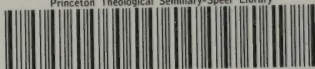
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